

## CHAPTER 4

### Interpretation, Conclusions, Implications, and Suggestions for Further Research

#### Interpretation Part 1

*The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall*, Gainesville, Florida, has served the community as a creative outlet, having provided an ever-changing landscape with the ability to arouse a gamut of varying emotions within the viewers. As Table 4 has shown, images on *The Wall* have, for the most part, been in constant movement, coming and going like bees to a honeycomb. The *We Remember* panel continues to serve as a tribute and a memorial for the victims of the 1990 Gainesville student murders. It also serves as a healing agent, a balm for the souls of those left behind. One mother stated she visited *The Wall* on the anniversary of her son's death. She said when she mourned at the cemetery she was alone, but when she came to The Wall she felt others mourned with her. She appeared to have received a measure of solace through sharing her grief.

The graffiti art on *The Wall* is readily deciphered and understood by the viewing public, especially university students. Controversy arises because the wall serves as a community mirror through which each person sees a particular reality. The creative process appears to be of as much importance as the content. Local artist William Schaaf (2001) observed,

The daily changes, the confluence and diversity of energy enlivens the wall with an on-going force (of nature) of human affirmation . . . . And by the way, it's all about the *We Remember* panel the energy; the expression of

**Table 4 Duration of Stay**

Extent of Weeks	Number of Images
2	379
3	202
4	100
5	51
6	36
7	22
8	17
9	12
10	17
11	16
12	2
13	3
15	1
16	2
18	3
19	2
20	1
25	1
33	1
112	1

ideas through a long established form. . . .

Many regard the wall as a bastion of free expression. And some began to see it as something like holy ground after one panel of the wall was used as a memorial to the five college students killed in 1990 by Danny Rollings (p. 1).

The themes of *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* murals document life from birth to death; times of celebration and sadness; political, religious, and social issues; and personal insights into a variety of issues affecting our daily lives. This scope of interest stretches from the local to the state, national, and international arenas. The messengers of this informal dialogue may well be a recent immigrant or an individual whose ancestors were among the earliest pioneers of this country. The ancient murals of cultures and religions around the world have been woven into the fabric of the murals. Signs, symbols, and images of those cultures continue to exist and have been translated onto *The Wall*. The murals of *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* are truly a community endeavor, a community stretching around and across the world – a global community. Freeman (2003) stated this global culture is rapidly shifting from text-based communication to image saturation communication.

Harriet Senie and Sally Webster (1992) in *Critical Issues in Public Art – Content, Context, and Controversy* stated, “The role of public art in creating a national identity, contending that each work can only be understood by analyzing the context in which it is commissioned, built and received” (p. 1). This function of public art has been impacted by the diversity of ever increasing dissimilar groups in our society. The concept “melting pot” has long been used, primarily in American education (Grigsby, J. E., 1977; Litsinger, D., 1973; Mason, R., 1988; Sadker, D. P. & Sadker, D. M., 1988).

The concept of “melting pot” has, of late, been revised to “salad bowl.” The amalgam still exists but has been altered to include the idea that enough of our original differences remain to provide us an independent identity within a group. The United States has long been unified, but this does not deflect or subtract from our individualism. How many times have you asked or been asked, “Where did you come from”? Americans will readily reply, “ I am an American.” Only rarely is the answer a foreign country, even if both parents immigrated from the same country, the same city, the same town. We are a salad bowl. Yes, we recognize, retain, and value our genetic and nationality differences, but it is far easier to see our commonalities than our differences. Images and dialogue representing these cultural differences appear side by side on *The Wall*, remaining for a time, unaltered, to be observed by passing motorists.

Learning how to relate to another's life experience opens doors to understanding on a higher and wider level. We have to start somewhere to understand each other in our ever-shrinking multicultural world. To understand another’s life experience and to develop a relationship requires awareness of their needs and desires on many levels, from assisting a newly-arrived foreign exchange student to providing critical care in extreme danger. K. M. Cox, a career Army Special Forces veteran, explains how to develop a relationship with the natives in a combat zone. The first way was to treat the village, especially the children and pregnant women, with medical care, then food, and protection from the enemy (CSM K.M. Cox, personal communication, December, 2002). Information gleaned from the art on *The Wall* can be offered and received in the same manner. Extrapolating the scenario within this mountain village under hostile fire to our newer immigrants, relating to them in more positive and productive manner. Attempting to relate to and understand another on a very basic and humane level should provide a foundation on which to build the future. "Win their hearts" with kindness, nurturing, and protection and then approach their minds.

Painting on *The Wall* provides an important outlet for many young people in the community. Its ever-changing state represents what is going on at the core of this small university city. Another benefit is the decrease of graffiti around the city.

In 1850, the United States Census reported no foreign ancestry group with a population reaching one million. The Irish ancestry group numbered 962,000; the Germans 584,000; Great Britain 379,000; Canada 148,000; France 54,000; Switzerland 13,000; Mexico 13,000; Norway 13,000; Holland 10,000, and Italy 4,000. By 2000, this influx of future Americans had exploded.

The 2000 United States Census reported four foreign ancestry groups with populations exceeding one million. The largest of this group were from Mexico 7,841,000; China 1,391,000; Philippines 1,222,000; India 1,007,000; Cuba 952,000; Vietnam 863,000; El Salvador 765,000; Korea 701,000; Dominican Republic 692,000; and Canada, 678,000. These statistical records have been collected and preserved by our government, providing proof of the continuing diversity of our national heritage.

With these American citizens of foreign ancestry and birth, the availability of affordable foreign travel, and the vast amount of information available via the World Wide Web, foreign cultures are more accessible than ever before. The American psyche and lives are inundated with differing cultural aspects within their lives. We need to be aware of the cultures throughout the world in order to understand, appreciate, and interpret our surroundings, our world. Awareness connects us to humanity through time. It connects us to our own lives and helps us come to grips with ourselves. Each of our ancestors passed on a vital part of themselves – their genetic code. A part of each of our mothers, since the beginning of mankind, is inherited through our mitochondrial DNA.

Human evolution reveals the progress we have made and how our extended environment has become better. This desire and need has remained a part of our psyche and continues to be present. Claude Lévi Strauss (1969) stated the human mind remains the same whether it be savage or civilized. Howard Gardner (1982) summarized, “The savage mind is the mind of us all.

*The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* murals differ from mainstream art because they reflect the vitality of people defining and redefining themselves beginning with the present and extending into the past utilizing their former and inherited culture. Foreign student groups reminisce and display their allegiance to their country of origin (Figure 47). These panels seem to shout, “We are here, but still remember we came from there.” The combination of this defining and redefining coupled with the *now*, the immediacy of current events (Figure 45), and the relative short life of the mural result in a vitality and scope not offered by static visual art forms. The location of the wall and its purpose provide a certain degree of assurance that the neighborhood will not change radically in the near or distant future.

Each culture had a special way of expressing itself depending on its own perception, imagination, and capability to use and transform the available natural resources. Changes in technology have decidedly influenced the aesthetic presentation of murals. Earlier murals were

always done with a brush “but spray cans and felt markers have changed everything” (Cesaretti, 1975, p. 67). Until the recent arrival of the spray paint can (Los Angeles in 1984), chalk and charcoal were the historical media of choice. Chalk and charcoal are more easily transported and hidden in pant pockets than a paintbrush and paint can; and have the ability to cover a wide variety of surfaces such as rough and smooth stone, wood, and stucco. Romoysky (1976) believed that before the spray-paint can era, young people used shoe polish, applied with the rectangular sponge applicators on these containers. Fleming (1974) noted that synthetic colors, commercial paints, acrylics, and various textural additives have supplanted the earth pigments and natural oils used for centuries.

The primary paint container utilized on *The Wall* has been the commercial paint spray can. The official trash preventive measure was the placement of several large metal containers along the length of *The Wall*. This appears to have been mostly successful.

The range of colors used on *The Wall* included many not available commercially. The most common source for paint was Walmart, where an 11 ounce can cost \$.99 plus tax. These were primarily red, blue, green, yellow, white, orange, and black. The other subtle variations of color were obtained primarily by one method - paint blending.

An example of this use of present-day technology, the imagination, and inventiveness is the Danish graffiti artist RENS. In 1987, he developed a technique to blend cans of spray paint to obtain a wide range of pastel colors. RENS has claimed ownership to 75 tones of blue!

Figure 50 demonstrates how the 40 mm plastic tube found in the center of a ballpoint pen has been modified to become the connection between two cans of spray. Both ends of the plastic tube have a 2.5 mm x 1.5 mm slot cut out. To mix the color baby blue, REN suggested, a can of white paint be placed in a freezer, in order to decrease the pressure in the can. Meanwhile, a can of dark blue spray paint is gradually heated to increase the pressure. Above 50° C (122° F) the can has a tendency to explode! The aforementioned tube is connected to the freezing can of white paint and the hot can of dark blue paint. The white can is placed on top of the dark blue can. Gently pressing the cans together forces the hot dark blue paint upward into the cold white can. This procedure may be repeated to achieve a specific color. Experimentation appears to be prime factor in producing a wide variety of blended colors not available on the open market. Problems arise if the paints are not compatible, the most common of which is thickness and lumps in the final mixture.

### Examples:

- Blue in White = Babyblue.
- Red in Blue = Purple.
- Red in White = Pink.
- Yellow in White = Lemon.
- Orange and Yellow in White = Peach.
- Black in Red = Bordeaux.
- Brown in White = Beige.
- Green or Blue in Yellow = Slimegreen.
- Blue in Green = Turquoise.
- Brown in Yellow = Curry.
- Red in Green = YACK!!!
- Silver in Pink = DON'T TRY!!!

Figure 1.



Figure 50. Results of blended spray paint and mixing tool (RENS, p. 1, 2003).

Graffiti artist devised this ingenious method to expand the range of colors available to any painter with the desire, and courage, to attempt to add to their pallet. Many Hip-Hop graffiti panels on *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* glow with astounding color combinations. The trashcans on the pavement at *The Wall* inevitably contained aerosol paint cans. A weekly drive down 34<sup>th</sup> Street has been a visionary delight. Friends and acquaintances continued to be surprised at the beauty of the panels that have been photographed. My camera resides on the back seat of my vehicle with the maps and other survival paraphernalia. It is a rare occasion when *The Wall* does not possess a “winner.”

Numerous locals continue to discuss “that really long” mural painted by the internationals in 1998. *The Wall* is on a major thoroughfare, with frequent traffic delays. The ever-changing messages and images on *The Wall* can make the trip memorable. It is surprising there seldom are rear-ended auto crashes on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in front of *The Wall*. The murals on *The Wall* reflect social, religious, political, racial, ethnic, gendered, cultural, folkloric, motivational, and aesthetic positions of the area, not to mention the ever-present inane “scribbler.” The information may be timely or outdated, personal, informative, controversial, or irritatingly frank. Everyone may paint on *The Wall*, anytime they desire. The messages on *The Wall* may amuse you, shock you, or make you shake your head in wonder. One huge foreign word which was on *The Wall* was so striking in appearance I was motivated to research its meaning. Analyzing the colorful Hare Krishna panel motivated me to read *Monkey on a Stick* by Hubner and Gruson (1988). The

images present in graffiti murals are found emblazoned on a wide array of commercial products for all ages. Graffiti murals have had an interesting journey from the railroad car, to any surface that moved or remained static, to art galleries and auction houses, and to the colorful shirt on a “Hip” teenager. It is an art form of the people, by the people, and for the people. The graffiti art on *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* fits neatly into Anderson’s (1983) analytical schema, “social in its essence, and specific in terms of culture, or subculture, and place”(p.367).

## **Interpretation Part 2**

### ***The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* Survey Questionnaire**

The purpose of this survey was to explore the local community’s response to the murals on *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall*, Gainesville, Florida, early in 2004.

**(PLEASE CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE ANSWER)**

**AGE**

18-20	56-60
21-25	61-65
26-30	66-70
31-35	71-75
36-40	76-80
41-45	81-85
46-50	86-90
51-55	90↑

**GENDER      Female      Male**

**ETHNIC GROUP**

Caucasian	African-American
Asian	American Indian
Other	

**EDUCATION**

(years)

1-5	13-14
6-10	15-16
11-12	17-18
	19 or more

**OCCUPATION**

**Table 5 Survey Questions Results**

AGE		GENDER	EDUCATION (Years)		ETHNIC GROUP
15-20	1	Female 19	6-10	2	Caucasian 27
21-25	3	Male 11	11-12	10	African-American 3
26-30	2		15-16	4	
41-45	4		17-18	10	
46-50	4		19+	4	
56-60	4				
61-65	4				
66-70	2				
71-75	4				
81-85	1				

**Table 6 Profile of Participant**

OCCUPATION		HOME LOCATION
Homemaker	4	Within city
Musician/artist	4	limits 10
Teacher	2	1-3 miles
Librarian	1	outside limits 4
Retired	6	4-6 miles
Fireman	2	outside limits 6
Student	1	10-15 miles 2
Nurse	3	outside limits 3
None listed	7	25+ miles 7

Locations utilized for selecting the participants for this survey was arbitrary - settings such as the physician's waiting room, the grocery market waiting area, the blood bank waiting room, the local library, the music school waiting area, and the homes of neighbors and families. The majority of people asked complied while a few "didn't want to be bothered."

As shown in Table 5, the thirty subjects surveyed for this research ranged across a wide age span: 15 – 85 years. This included 3% between 15-20, 16% between 21, 30% between 31-40, 56.6% between 41-65, and 23% between 66-85. This included 63.3% females and 36.6% males. Their years of education included 6.6% with 6-10 years, 33.3% with 11-12 years, 13.3% with 15-16 years, 33.3% with 17-18 years, and 13.3% with over 19 years.

Table 6 shows ten percent were African-American and 90% Caucasians. Table 6b shows a wide range of occupations: 13.3% homemakers, 13.3% musicians/artists, 6.6% teachers, 3% librarians, 20% retired, 3% students, 10% nurses, and 23% listed no occupation.

1. Where do you live?

- Within city limits of Gainesville
- 1-3 miles
- 4-6 miles
- 7-9 miles
- 10-15 miles
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**ANSWER 1.** Seven (23.9%) participants of this research resided outside a twenty-five mile radius of the 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall. Ten percent lived within the city limits of Gainesville and the remainder lived in Alachua County: 13.3% lived within three miles; 20% within 4-6 miles; 10% within 10-15 miles; and 23.9% over twenty five miles away.

2. How often do you drive, bicycle, or walk on 34<sup>th</sup> Street? (Circle one)

- 1-2 times a day
- more than 3 times a day
- once a week
- once a month
- never

**ANSWER 2.** The 34<sup>th</sup> Street corridor is a main thoroughfare and has a dense traffic pattern. Eighteen subjects (60%) passed by *The Wall* once a week and noted they looked at it every time they did so. Ten (30%) noted they passed by once a month and surprisingly two (6%) did so 1-2 times per day.

3. If you drive down 34<sup>th</sup> Street, do you look at the graffiti art on *The Wall*?

every time

often

seldom

never

**ANSWER 3.** Asked if they drove down 34<sup>th</sup> Street, did they look at the graffiti, eighteen (60%) replied every time; eight (26.6%) often; and four (13.3%) seldom.

4. Do you “go out of your way” to see *The Wall*?

very often

often

seldom

never

**ANSWER 4.** When asked if they “go out of your way” to see *The Wall* fourteen (46%) replied never, ten (30%) seldom, and six (20%) often.

5. Have you ever had a traffic accident or been involved in an accident while traveling on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in front of *The Wall*?

**ANSWER 5.** When asked if they had ever had an accident while traveling on 34<sup>th</sup> Street adjacent to the graffiti: twenty-eight (93.3%) replied no; and two (6.6%) yes. The local news media have, at times, alluded to the possible dangers generated by the distraction of the

painting of the graffiti to drivers passing by. Traffic reports have not quantified such occurrences.

6. What is the most offensive graffiti message you have seen on *The Wall*?

political state message \_\_\_\_\_

religious state message \_\_\_\_\_

obscene state message \_\_\_\_\_

personal state message \_\_\_\_\_

death state message \_\_\_\_\_

other state message \_\_\_\_\_



Figure 51. Panel # 24, July 30,1999.

**ANSWER 6.** The most reaction to the content offensive messages painted on *The Wall* was generated by the *WE REMEMBER* panel. Thirty percent (10) found the perceived denigration of the panel to be offensive and objected to one message written over it – *People Die* (Figure 52). Six (20%) replied the word “fuck” was obscene. Two (6.6%) found “Bush sucks” offensive.

7. What is the most inspiring message you have seen on the Wall?

**ANSWER 7.** Six (20%) found the panel *WE REMEMBER* the most inspiring message on *The Wall* while fourteen (46%) do not even read the messages. The message *ABORTION IS MURDER* inspired two (6.6%).

8. Have you ever painted on *The Wall*?

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- other \_\_\_\_\_

**ANSWER 8.** Only two (6.6%) subjects surveyed had painted one time and two (6.6%) had painted twice on *The Wall*. Twenty-six (86%) subjects surveyed had never painted on *The Wall*.

9. Have other members of your family painted on *The Wall*?

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Friends?

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- other \_\_\_\_\_

**ANSWER 9.** Twenty-eight (93%) noted that no members of their families had painted on it either. Two (6.6%) said their friends had painted “too many times to count” on *The Wall* and four (13.3%) said their friends had painted twice. Twenty-four (80%) reported none of their friends had ever written on *The Wall*.

10. Do you know the significance of the We Remember panel?

- Yes
- No

**ANSWER 10.** Fourteen (46%) reported they knew the significance of the *WE REMEMBER* panel. Four (13.3%) did not.

11. Would it surprise you that the We Remember panel has been painted on *The Wall* for more than twelve years?

- yes
- no

**ANSWER 11.** Asked if they would be surprised the *WE REMEMBER* PANEL has remained on *The Wall* for more than ten years twenty-four (80%) replied no and six ((20%) yes.

12. Which messages would you prefer not to be on *The Wall*?

- sports scores
- birthday greetings
- death notices
- holiday messages
- advertisements
- other \_\_\_\_\_

**ANSWER 12.** Messages seen on *The Wall* were sports scores – two (6.6%), birthday greetings – two (6.6%), death notices – four (13.3%), holiday message – two (6.6%), advertisement – ten (33.3%), obscene – two (6.6%), religion – two (6.6%), and none – four (13.3%).

13. Whom do you think paints on *The Wall*? (choose as many as applies)

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> serious students     | <input type="checkbox"/> males      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “party” students     | <input type="checkbox"/> females    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> juvenile delinquents | <input type="checkbox"/> locals     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gang members         | <input type="checkbox"/> visitors   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> want-to-be-artists   | <input type="checkbox"/> teenagers  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> serious artists      | <input type="checkbox"/> adults     |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> psychotics |

**ANSWER 13.** There was a wide latitude of profiles which the subjects thought the writers on *The Wall* could be placed: serious students – ten (33.3%), “party” students – twenty (66%), juvenile delinquents – eight (26.6%), gang members – two (6.6%), want-to-be-artists – eighteen (60%), serious artists – eight (26.6%), males – twenty-eight (93.3%), females – twenty (66%), locals – fourteen (46%), visitors – two (66%), teenagers – twenty (66%), adults – eight

(26.6%), and psychotics – four (13.3%). These percentages reflect the participant's selection of more than one category in which to place a writer.

This survey has demonstrated that viewers from a rather wide local area see *The Wall* often, but will not drive out of their way to see it. The *We Remember* panel attracted the most interest while the majority of other panels were of no particular interest. Most surveyed understood the meaning of the *We Remember* panel but were surprised it has been on *The Wall* in excess of ten years. Most perceived denigration of this panel to be offensive. The majority of participants, their relatives, or friends had not painted on *The Wall*. The painters of *The Wall* were thought to be mainly juvenile males, party students, want-to-be and serious artists while few thought writers were gang members.

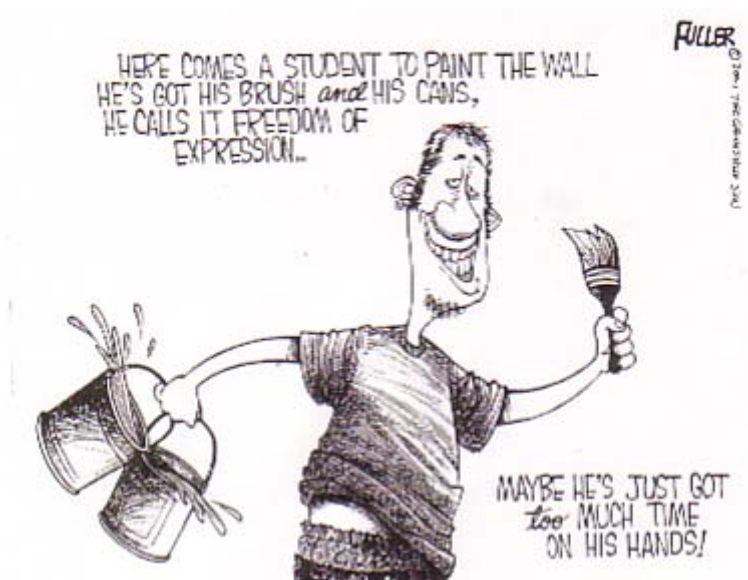


Figure 52. Jake Fuller cartoon  
(The Gainesville Sun, 12 December 2001, p. 8A).

Jake Fuller's cartoon (Figure 52) in the local newspaper is an example of the timelessness of local interest in *The Wall*. Fuller seemed to imply *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* graffiti artist is a carefree lackadaisical student splashing paint on *The Wall*. In actuality the

artists seem to have approached the activity with a precise determination to express themselves through their art. Both the graffiti artists and this cartoonist challenge the viewers to hold up a mirror and closely examine themselves.

## CONCLUSIONS

*The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* it has been continuously painted since 1990. The graffiti art have been met by a wide range of reactions, ranging from supportive acceptance to hostile disagreement. Local reaction to Nazism, Neo-Nazism, and their accompanying political symbols such as the swastika has been rather swift and intense. The swastika<sup>1</sup> is one of the more visible and widely used images in the world. The depiction may vary according to whether the “arms” are pointed in a clockwise or counter-clockwise position. The interpretation varies widely from ancient China, to Tibet, India, Scandinavia, Peru and modern Germany. The swastika has been interpreted within a wide range of contexts from the symbol of Buddha’s heart to the symbol of the Nazi Party. The swastika has been painted on *The Wall* many times, usually as a write-over. The adverse reaction appears to be more vocal, usually the same kind of overt physical reaction that defined the 1960s.

Public reaction usually begins with an individual or individuals physically altering the offending material by painting over it or making revisions and additions in accordance with their own beliefs - a socially self-governing system. These beliefs may or may not be the predominate opinion of the locals, but the input from the local media often fosters the impression the initial message represented a minority fringe element. One wonders how the local news media seem to be present, with cameras rolling, when the reactive alteration occurs.

The radical activism of the 1960s seems to be absent on *The Wall*. An occasional panel decried war, opposed abortion and drugs, or championed women’s rights. There were occasional panels by vegetarians (Figure 45). Panels were painted bemoaning over-extended credit cards (Figure 46) and praising local athletic coaches, especially football. Active duty military service members, returning and not returning, were honored.

The radicals of counter-cultures have not been as vocal as in the 1960s, or they may still be, but it has not been as avidly reported by the news media as it was then. A wave of national and local patriotism seems to have developed as a result of the destruction of *The Towers* in New

York City and the attack on the Pentagon in Washington, DC. This was akin to the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor in the 1940s.

Two panels, ROTC and POW-MIA (Figure 39), have been painted on *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* during the same week each year. No apparent negative reactions have been noted. Panels with political messages appear to not provoke negative responses. The overt rejection of the military complex and disdain for national patriotism existed during the Vietnam War Era, 1960-1975, (Battlefield Vietnam, 2004) continues, but not as loudly or destructively.

The unification of public sentiment against terrorism, foreign and domestic, appears to have an effect on *The Wall*'s military panels, which were eventually painted over, but were not marked over with derogatory graffiti. The reactions to murals appear to mirror that published by the news media. The hippies, dissidents, skinheads, and neo-Nazi now are delegated to the fringe element, not that they are not present and heard from occasionally.

Murals are primarily intended for the community that lives with them. With the expanded definition of community the interpretation and analysis has become more problematic. Many factors appear to influence both interpretation and analysis. Cockcroft et al (1987) reported, "it is important that the muralist live in or have some strong bond to the community, not just parachuted in to do good for the supposedly artless Other" (p. xi).

The relationship between the viewer and the graffiti artist ranges from empowerment to indifference; empowering because a connection had been achieved, indifferent because no connection was achieved. A relationship results in either empowerment or indifference, not both. A mural (Figure 44) that garners universal community approval is deemed by some to be a bland failure. Controversy encourages a critical look at place, process, and product possibly initiating new dialogue that encourages a vitalization of issues and new images.

But for the most part, murals aren't about courage and controversy (Figure 38). Finding a mural subject that the community will agree on and hopefully not tamper with is a selective process that requires the selection to be sensitive to many viewpoints. Mural artists often are not out to shock people, and some have lofty ideas about what these murals mean (Rochford, 1993). The murals (Figure 40) then function as a challenge and support of values and traditions, inspiration, and information. In 2001 Rachael Brown, a student, provided another viewpoint,

I believe that the 34<sup>th</sup> Street wall [sic] should be left alone. It provides an important outlet for many young people in our community. It is also really neat to see the wall in an ever-changing state, representing what is going on at the core of our little city. (p. 8 B)

The murals on *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* are public art, not because they are out of doors, but because they are the result of art activities and strategies using the public as the subject. A momentary glance at an image while driving down the street may provide a lasting imprint on the brain, an imprint filed away for later recall and possibly analysis. The length of stay for a mural on *The Wall* is transitory. *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* positions us in time, history, and place by portraying our ideas, traditions, and issues.

Wall paintings have existed throughout the world beginning with the earliest evidence of humans. They serve as a format to say, “I exist” and as a community mirror through which a community or an individual can view (Figure 49) his own particular reality. The murals also provide a window through which outsiders have access to the values generated by that culture.

Jacobson’s study refuted literature that states graffiti artists are untrained. Jacobson (1996) considers Hip-Hop painters as artists, the others as just “scribblers.” His survey found 42% had artists in their family and “generally they were planning to choose an artistic profession” (p. 3). The artists painting on *The Wall* appeared to be serious about their work. One of these artists was Gabe Lacktman, an architectural student at Florida International University. He arrived at *The Wall* with a rather large supply of paint and a bulging sketchbook. He did this on numerous occasions.

Hip-Hop graffiti are usually a group effort and ranges from stick figures to well executed portraits. Groups of artists (Figure 36) usually make huge paintings. “The graffiti artist is the last breed of artist, the one that has made a cyclical return to what was the advent of visual creation, the cave artists. The graffiti artists are the urban shamans and the streets are our modern day cave” (Element, 2002, p. 4).

Analyzing the visual evidence collected from *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* produced varied results. The predominant genre (Table 2) was Hip-Hop (21,71%), the predominant color (Table 3) was white (67%), over 99% of the images covered one or less panels (Table 4), and more than

99% of the images remained less than two weeks (Table 5). The images painted on *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* were constantly in transition.

With the development of home-owned digital cameras, laser printers, scanners, and computers, selected images from murals are easily reproduced, framed, and hung on any viewer's wall. This rapid reproduction of images has made it possible for the average citizen to own the image of a mural. So much so that laws have been enacted to protect the work of artists.

Courtney Harris reported 2001 was the second year in which artists organized to paint on *The 34th Street Wall*. Harris (2001), stated, "Any graffiti artist could apply online to have, for free, one of 50 spots on the half-mile wall" (p. 3B). My research has not uncovered the date of this first organized painting of *The Wall*. The online site *Art Crimes: Graffiti Shows and Events 2000* (<http://www.org/index/history2000.html>) lists *The Wall* as "*Beyond Extreme Graffiti Festival 2000 - Miracle on 34th Street. Location: 34th Street, When: During Gator Growl*" (p. 8). This 45-page site contains announcements from over twenty foreign countries. *The Wall* has been included in additional sites online by individual graffiti artists such as Daim.

During the analysis of *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall* murals, certain Hip-Hop images (Figure 34, 35) were so similar they appeared to be the work of a single artist. These murals may well be defined as art, but as a new form, a separate, independent art form. They appear to be the result of combining diverse elements of our culture. Modern humans, like early humans, continue to have the need to symbolize, to create meanings, and to search for meanings in their world. It may also be what Rahn (2002) labels "urban expression and artistic attempt to change public space" (p. 170).

It has been my experience that the muralist of *The 34th Street Wall* is a known entity, the kid next door, and a classmate. The graffiti artist is approachable. We see them painting on *The Wall* with paint on their hands, on their clothing, and in their hair. The graffiti artist has taken the unknown, the mysterious quality from the making of art. The demystification results in familiarity. The artist is now like *us*. We are on a par with the artist. We now have an investment in the art; we are part owner of the art. Modern graffiti are still about words and writing words on surfaces. Graffiti are one of the few movements that include people from all backgrounds, with one goal in mind.

The graffiti artists painting on *The Wall* have only themselves to please. I see no lines of investors to purchase their artistic effort. The artist satisfies their inner drive to create. It is left to

the art critic, the historian to attempt to decipher, analyze, and come to conclusions about the art. Often artists are unable to explain their art. How does one verbalize the essence of their inner creative energy?

Phillips (1999) reported that most graffiti artists said when they began graffiti it was more about the thrill of the act than anything else. Searching for a tribal identity they found it in the communal activities of Hip-Hop. As time passed their experience was changed because they became more aware of the issues that transformed their experience. Different sources encouraged them to learn from others and begin to feel a part of something and to make a contribution.

Graffiti art may be defined in many ways - as the basic component for defining ourselves as humans, as a means to define our differing cultures, as a mirror into ourselves, and as an open window through *which we observe others*. The birthday greeting to Adolph Hitler (Figure 48) painted on *The Wall* in 1999 evoked the anger of a local 59-year-old schoolteacher. At age nine she emigrated from West Berlin to the United States. She expressed her satisfaction painting over the salute to Hitler's birthday. Arndorfer (1999) quoted her reaction,

Every stroke of the brush gave me some satisfaction. . . . I feel like throwing some tomatoes at it to express my utter disgust. . . . I'm sure I'm not the only German in town, and everybody else would feel the same way. The younger generation has no idea what the Nazi period means to us. . . . I feel as a German I should do something good, to let people know there are good Germans, too. . . . You can see that after more than 50 years, you still have this feeling of contempt that you can't get rid of. . . . I wanted to spray over the whole thing, but then I thought this would be better. I wanted the guy who spray-painted it to know I understood what he wrote (p. 1B).

*The Gainesville Sun* (1999) printed one reaction from a local citizen, "I know this country is built on freedom of speech, but there is a limit. Public, written birthday salutations to Hitler is akin to yelling 'fire' in a crowded theater. Thank you again, Conradt, for your brave action" (p. 3C).

The majority of viewers function on the belief that art should tell a story. Hip-Hop does not tell a story. Instead it does tell a story with words or in conjunction with images. These images may have different meanings for different people. Each drawing is a message in itself, a means of communication at different levels.

I believe graffiti, as documented on *The Wall*, are an art form, not mindless scribbling on a large surface. The ultimate decision has possibly been made for us when art auction houses and galleries include selected images from graffiti murals in their inventories. Within the documented images in this brief investigation numerous images have captured the attention of a wide variety of viewers and the news media, local and international. But does it belong in a museum? With the changing of art also comes the changing of the definition of a museum.

The closed-space traditional museum has been defined by Burcaw (1997) as, "an institution existing to collect objects, maintain permanent collections, and base its educational work on these collections" (p. 18). Generally concurring with this definition are George Brown Goode (1895), the International Council of Museums (1956), Douglas Allen (1960), the American Association of Museums (1962), and Germain Bazin (1967).

But Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1977) departs radically from this traditional definition of a museum: "today, almost anything may turn out to be a museum. . . . The experience of going to a museum is often closer to that of going to a theme park or a funfair than that which used to be offered by the austere, glass-case museum" (p. 1). Hooper-Greenhill further stated it is a mistake to think there is "one form of reality" (p. 1) for museums. Historically, museums have changed many times to accommodate changes in power, and social, economic, and political institutions.

Collections of objects have been kept in *cabinets* (cabinet in which a collection of precious objects were kept ca. 17th and 18th century), private homes, palaces, world fair exhibitions, and neoclassical buildings specifically constructed as museums. There has been no essential museum direct line of descent. Carol Stapp (2000) reported that a 1990s analyst from outside the museum field predicted future changes would "influence the museum at its very core" (p. 20).

No century in recorded history has experienced as many social changes and such radical changes as the twentieth century: changes which affected museums. Many museums have designed impressive three-dimensional museum sites on the Web, complete with graphics and interactive storytelling. Through the computer, visitors can now tour exhibitions and browse

collections. David Anderson (2000) observed, "one exciting aspect of the evolving museum field is that museums, too, are listening. And as they listen, they are noticing a change in the voices from both within and outside museum walls. From within they hear about things visitors expect to see, hear, and do; they hear about how visitors learn. From outside, they hear about changing expectations, roles, and responsibilities as the climate, complexion, and structure of communities change" (p. 37) Museums help define our collective culture, and in order to survive for the long haul must periodically reinvent themselves.

Expanding the traditional definition of the museum to include the open-air museum without walls, i.e. *The 34th Street Wall*, may be viewed not as change but inclusion.

*The 34th Street* murals may be compared to cave drawings, enabling the viewer an insight into who lived here and their values. Historically, much of our knowledge is what we have learned from the past. The making of this art is about the human condition.

## IMPLICATIONS

Dissanayake (1992) observed that individuals within a given culture learn the rules of expression within that culture. This learning is usually on a subconscious level occurring outside the parameters of formal education. It would probably be difficult to remember how one learned the existing rules by which a specific image is defined within that culture. Does one remember when, where, or how they learned the rules of representation for images within their society? If too many of these rules are altered, the viewer may not be able to recognize the image or misinterprets the representation altogether. One such image may be the Coca Cola logo. This image is readily recognized as long as the flowing, curving Arabic letters appear in the image, be it English, Spanish, French, or Italian. But when the language is Sino-Tibetan or Sanskrit the rules of depiction are vastly changed and the viewer may not recognize or correctly interpret the representation.

This research has encompassed the collection of data from one specific site over an extended period of time in lieu of a wide geographical area, a narrow specific time-frame, or a concentration on specific artists. Perhaps future researchers will find it of use for what Jane Gadsby has labeled the Sociolinguistic Approach – examining the material completely but indirectly and selective looking. Gadsby (1995) wrote,

This entails taking an event (such as the writing of a graffiti) and then working outwards to incorporate other events, cultural facts, local customs, and anything that would have influenced the written graffiti. It is only in this way that researchers can really come close to understanding events, cultural facts, local customs, and anything that would have influenced the written graffiti. It is only in this way that researchers can really come close to understanding since in most cases we have no access to the minds of these people (p. 8).

### **EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

Teachers need to introduce art to every student and explain art and how that art is a necessity in our lives. It provides an avenue through which ideas and emotions may be expressed providing a language and translation between cultures. The differences between cultures may be threatening to students. Hip-Hop art facilitates a common language used by the youth culture and supplies a basic foundation for students to understand other cultures and to learn from each other. Having students research their own family origins may encourage students to ask their parents, grandparents, and other relatives about their own heritage. Sharing this information with other students through their art fosters an atmosphere of learning and understanding. Exposure to a wide range of Hip-Hop art provides images from which to build their artistic vocabulary. These images may be rendered on paper, cardboard, canvas, wood, or large pieces of tree bark.

Students are continually exposed to a plethora of graffiti art in magazines, on television, on the World Wide Web, and on all manner of textiles and clothing. This exposure may also encourage their involvement in the community.

Educators need to value popular culture in order for there to be an exchange of knowledge from outside the classroom. This encourages students to become active participants in a dialogue with their teachers and peers. It enables the student to become active in the creation of ideas instead of a passive recipient of an arsenal of information. Hip-Hop graffiti has the potential to bring youth together from across race, gender, and socioeconomic boundaries.

Local artists engaged in the production of murals are to be found in most urban areas. They usually provide an eager pool of individuals ready to share information related to future

career paths. This provides an attractive and interesting venue for students to learn how to research, interview people in art, evaluate the wide scope of art vocations, and explore how the art world functions. This prepares students for life during and after the traditional school years. Understanding and learning about the art and history of the people with whom we have daily contact should help in overcoming our stereotypical conceptions.

Art stimulates social change and empowers those “on the outside looking in” by supplying a positive identity and respect. It enables them to shout “Look At Me,” “I Am Here To Stay.” It validates Malraux (1953) “All art is a revolt against man’s fate” (p. 639).

This study recorded the graffiti art on one specific site in Gainesville, Florida, over a twenty-six-month period, 1998-2000. This data has provided information by which contemporary American graffiti art may be evaluated and better understood. This site specific multidimensional approach may also provide data with which to compare future research, including graffiti art’s relationship with other current art forms. The scope of investigation for this research should not be limited in its geographical scope or time-frame, but brevity dictates a narrowing of these parameters.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The scope of future research made possible by the murals on *The 34<sup>th</sup> Street Wall*, Gainesville, Florida, is limited only by the imagination and work ethic of the researcher. One glaring area for future research is an obvious need for homogenized nomenclature specific to Hip-Hop Graffiti Art. A wide variety of terms and definitions exist among the many writers of books, magazines, and the World Wide Web. Research of this type would probably require an almost new language for the description, analysis, and criticism of Graffiti Art.

The Sanders-Bustle (2005) summary is most appropriate,

Today's world is an integrated world where information is no longer confined to traditional knowledge structures. Instead, information moves quickly from one area to another, crossing diverse cultures, while blurring boundaries between representations. Contemporary technological advances have significantly impacted the ways learners process and synthesize

information while shifting attention away from how much information one retains to how one shapes and then uses information. An integrated approach to teaching and learning makes sense (p. 1).