

# American People (1963 – 1967)

In the summer of 1963, Ringgold began *American People*, a series of politically-charged paintings in response to the increasing racial violence that was tearing at the seams of American society. Rendered in a graphic, sharply delineated style inspired by African sculpture that she dubbed “Super Realism,” the portrayals marry geometry with figuration. Mask-like faces appear both lifelike yet uncanny, intimate yet aloof, in ambiguous situations that observe power imbalances and relationships between Black and white figures.

The American flag, a recurring motif in Ringgold’s work, makes its first appearance in *The Flag is Bleeding* (1967). Blood drips from the flag’s familiar stripes, transforming individual suffering into the pain of a people. In another device she will return to, Ringgold employs camouflaged text in *U.S. Postage Stamp Commemorating the Advent of Black Power* (1967). Hidden among the faces of many shades representing the demographic makeup of the United States are the phrases “BLACK POWER” and “WHITE POWER.” “BLACK POWER” reads in a modest diagonal bisecting the composition, whereas “WHITE POWER” is integrated into the structure of the grid, inseparable from the very social structure that governs American life.