What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore –

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over –

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes

Part Two
The Ghetto in our Hearts

Romans 7: 18-20

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."
- James Baldwin

"You have to get over the fear of facing the worst in yourself. You should instead fear unexamined racism. Fear the thought that right now, you could be contributing to the oppression of others and you don't know it. But do not fear those who bring that oppression to light. Do not fear the opportunity to do better."
- Ijeoma Oluo, So You Want to Talk About Race

"The problem is that white people see racism as conscious hate, when racism is bigger than that. Racism is a complex system of social and political levers and pulleys set up generations ago to continue working on the behalf of whites at other people's expense, whether whites know/like it or not. Racism is an insidious cultural disease. It is so insidious that it doesn't care if you are a white person who likes black people; it's still going to find a way to infect how you deal with people who don't look like you." — Scott Woods, "The Problem with 'Nice Racism'"

"We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." James Baldwin

"I believe that there's youth in white America that can be a tremendous force for good. But they have to be knowledgeable about the history of racism in America and how it manifests itself today." - James Baldwin

"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." - Audre Lorde

1987 - I am speaking in Tufts university, MA

The Ghetto in our Hearts

Thirty years of racism workshops for American students has reaffirmed my belief in people's basically good intentions. Students will collect food for the poor or form human chains across the country — gestures that show how deeply we want to believe racism is no longer about skin color or religion.

Yet I often hear whites say they wish they could adopt black children "so they can become just like us."

We thus reveal that it is their different behavior we "blame" and "distance ourselves from" in our caste hierarchical thinking

But behavior doesn't arise in a vacuum. It reflects centuries of exclusion: Black Americans shaped by segregation and terror; Roma by persecution; Muslim immigrants by dictatorships and patriarchal cultures long before ever meeting us.

Our liberal self-image collapses the moment someone arrives from outside our comfortable "territory" with habits we don't understand. Then our values are tested.

Here in Part 2 we'll look at how we react when millions of poor Black migrants from the American South — or newly arrived Muslim refugees — come north hoping finally to be met as equals. Do we live up to our lofty ideals? Or do we escape into "evasive racism", pushing them into ghettos of our making, outer or inner?
The answer reveals more about "the ghetto in our hearts" than about the people we claim to help.

1986 - 5-6 million holding hands across America as part of the "We are the World" campaign

1974 - Greenville, NC

1973 - Boston

1975 - rural Eastern SC

1974 - Queens, NYC

Ideological blinders

Deuteronomy 15: 7-11

"True activism is not about raising your voice. It's about changing the world." - Amanda Gorman, inaugural poet

Everywhere I go, I meet a shocking inability to see suffering right under people's noses. People in the North talk about poverty in the South but miss the poverty in their own ghettos. People in the East talk about Indian poverty in the West without seeing their own Black poverty; people in the West talk about Black poverty in the East while ignoring the Indians' misery nearby. And in the South, they don't talk about poverty at all.

I saw a vivid example of this blindness when I once hitched a ride in Mississippi with a classic optimist. He recited the usual clichés: America is full of opportunity, anyone can succeed if "you pull yourself up by your bootstraps," anyone can become a millionaire in ten years, and so on.

I've heard that refrain so often while riding past shacks that I might have ignored it—if we hadn't been driving that day through a flooded stretch of the Delta with poor tenant farmers sitting on their tin-roofed shacks. Sometimes only a chimney rose above the water with their drowned mules and pigs. Others paddled around their submerged homes trying to save their livestock. Yet my driver insisted everything was possible "if you just try."

Another such moment I had in Detroit. I was walking with a Black woman who'd been a Panther at sixteen and was now a Trotskyite feminist. We were heading to a Trotskyite meeting—a Friday, naturally, when they serve free coffee and cake. (Churches give coffee quicker, but Trotskyites really make you go through hell with a three-hour sermon on saving "the masses" before granting the cake reward.)

On our way to our cake-for-the-masses meeting, we passed a beggar with his hand out. To my shock she brushed him off. I asked why, since I knew she had money. "That kind of nonsense must wait until after the revolution," she said. I asked, "But what if the revolution doesn't come in his lifetime?" She didn't answer.

In contrast to these middle-class cases, the upper class—if they accidentally see suffering—can be touchingly helpful. In Gainesville, Florida, I lived with a wealthy insurance man and one day helped him hoist a tenant farmer's mule out of a mud hole with his helicopter. The farmer stood in water up to his neck holding the mule's head above water. The scene looked like a communist cartoon, but neither the proletarian nor the capitalist saw the humor. It would be fun if the rich man himself fell into the mud hole, I was thinking.

1974 - NYC

1973 - NYC

1973 - flooding in the delta around Greenwood, MS

My pious wish came true: as he landed and approached the hole, he slipped, broke his leg. Since he had to stay in bed for some time, I borrowed his Mercedes and, on one of my drives, found Linda's shack on a far deserted road.

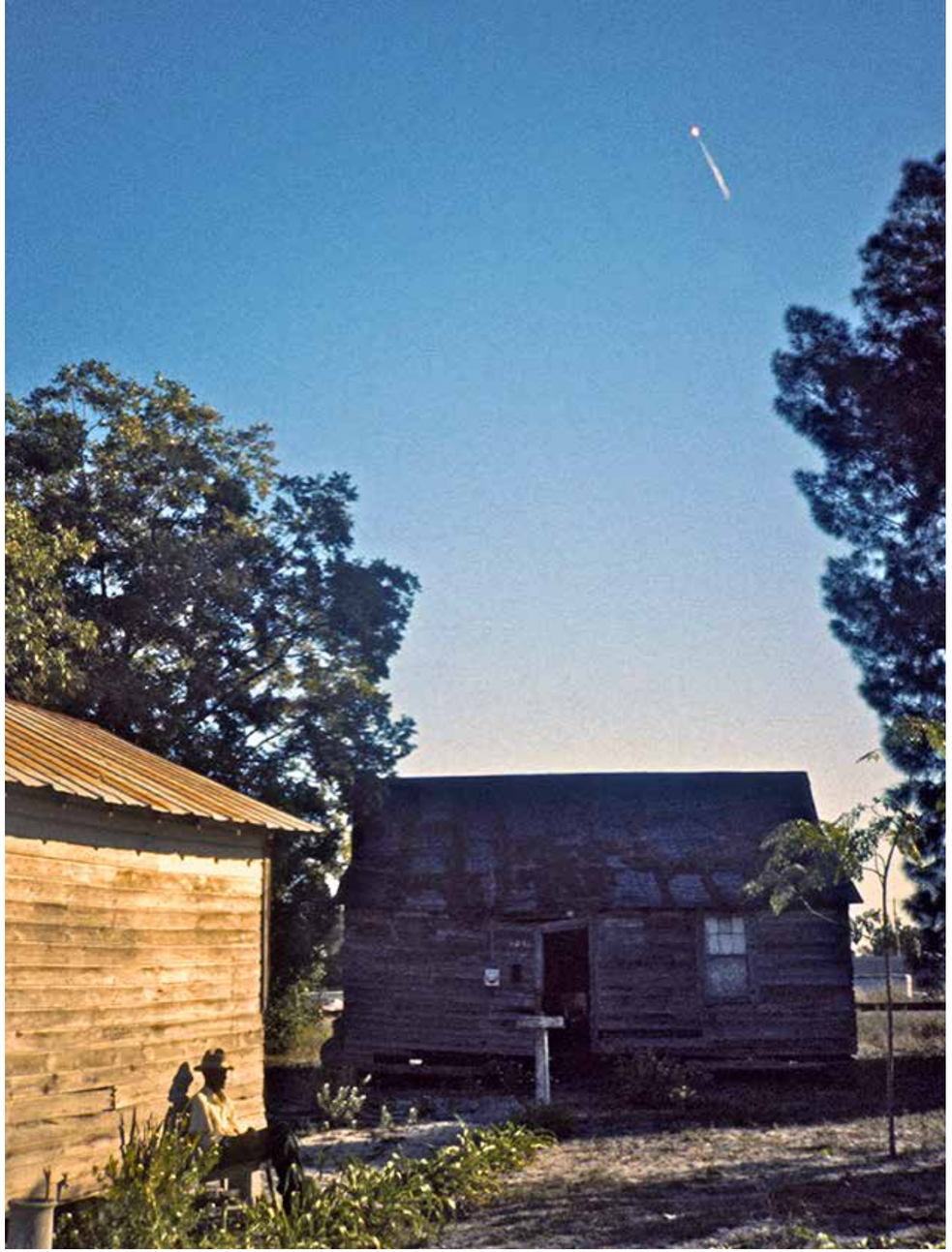
Then there was Tommy Howard (page 170), a playboy millionaire who picked me up in his Jaguar and took me to a ski resort where he spent fortunes tio score "girls."

Yet he was so struck by my vagabond slogan, "Security is being on the road with no money," that he first gave me keys to his mansion, then soon sold his business to "live your vagabond philosophy."

He spent seven years hitchhiking the world. In Africa he made his first Black friend—ironic, since he'd lived in a town 50% Black but had never invited a Black person into his home except those I came hitchhiking with.

Whether you have nothing or too much, the outcome can be the same: an arrogant blindness toward those forced into homelessness and poverty. That Tommy later traveled in a giant motorhome writing The Freedom Machine, while I toured in a customized van lecturing on "the freedom to say yes," revealed again our shared white privilege in an unfree society.

From letters



1974 - Titusville, FL

I ask Charles Smith, an ex-slave, if he thinks blacks have been free since the abolition of chattel slavery.

1974 - rural Greenville, NC

Reaching for the Stars Leaving Our Neighbors in the Dust

"I don't care about the moon. I care about the people who are suffering here on Earth. The moon is not going to solve our problems. We need to invest in education, health care, and social justice." — Kendrick Lamar

- Do you think the black man is free today?
Ex-slave Charles Smith:
– No, he ain't never been free.

As America's oldest citizen, Charles Smith was invited as guest of honor at a moon-rocket launch.

He declined; he simply refused to believe a man could ever reach the moon. One morning, in the area where I still hitched rides on mule-drawn wagons, I watched through the cracks of the shack I'd stayed in as a rocket rose into the sky above him.

But this old man—Cape Canaveral's closest neighbor—never noticed. He had no electricity, no radio, no way of knowing about the billion-dollar project unfolding over his roof. And even if someone had told him, he was too malnourished and too sick to lift his head and look up.rocket.

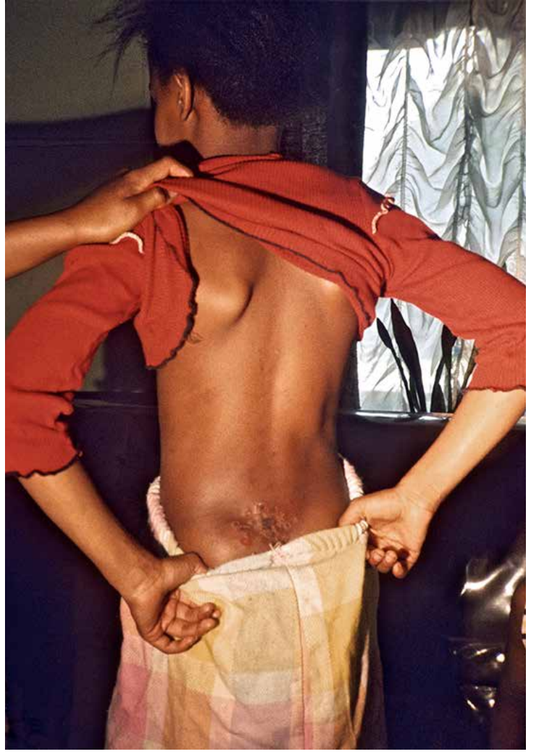
Below both from 1972 - Lower East Side, NYC

1974 - Bronx, NY

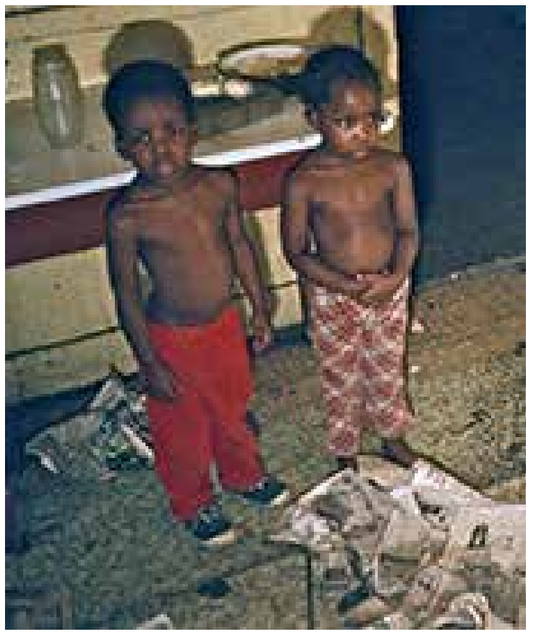
WHITEY ON THE MOON

A rat done bit my sister Nell
with whitey on the moon
her face and arms began to swell
and whitey's on the moon.
I can't pay no doctor bills
when whitey's on the moon
ten years from now I will be paying still
while whitey's on the moon,
You know, the man just upped my rent last night
because whitey's on the moon.
No hot water, no toilet, no light
'cause whitey's on the moon.
I wonder why he's upping me
because whitey's on the moon?
Well, I was already paying him 50 a week
and now whitey's on the moon.
Taxes taking my whole damn check,
the junkies making me a nervous wreck,
the price o f food is going up
and if all this crap wasn't enough,
a rat done bit my sister Nell
with whitey on the moon,
her face and arms began to swell
and whitey's on the moon.
With all that money I made last year
for whitey on the moon,
how come I don't got any here?
Hm! whitey's on the moon...
You know, I just about had my fill
of whitey on the moon,
I think I'll send these doctor bills
airmail special ..... to whitey on the moon!

1973 - East Detroit



1973 - East Detroit



1974 - Chicago

"The freeways were a tool of segregation and oppression. They divided Black communities, made it harder for us to get to work and school, and created a physical barrier that symbolized the racial divide in America." - Ta-Nehisi Coates

Six hundred Black babies in Chicago died of rat bites and malnutrition the year America planted a flag on the moon. When I stayed with a family in Detroit, four children were bitten by rats in their sleep. Their cries vanished beneath the highway traffic outside their home.

Caught in our own system, we whites speed along superhighways from safe suburbs to downtown jobs so we never face the rats, misery, and violence in the ghettos below. What has numbed our natural love so completely that we drive over the suffering without a second thought? (Years later, as a busy lecturer, I did the same.)

LET'S GET RID OF RATS

EVERY TENANT MUST HELP

- Keep your house clean.
- Keep your food in covered jars or cans.
- Keep your garbage pail tightly covered.
- Do not throw garbage in the yard, hallway or dumbwaiter shaft.
- Keep your baby's crib clean.
- Wash your baby's face and body before putting him to bed. Rats follow the smell of milk.
- Watch your baby afterward.

Your landlord has been notified by the Health Department that he must exterminate the rats in your building. You can help get rid of rats in your own apartment. If we all cooperate, we can get rid of this nuisance.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Gil Scott-Heron's song *Whitey on the moon* - illustrated

1973 - Baton Rouge, LA

The Roads We Build: From Dreams to Nightmares

"THEY KILL THE DREAM OF AMERICA"
"Across the lines / Who would dare to go / Under the bridge / Over the tracks / That separates whites from blacks" – Tracy Chapman, som skrev sangen inspireret af at se Amerikanske Billeder i Harvard.

If you're a vagabond wandering beneath America's highways, you see society differently than the motorists above. Arriving from the South on a freezing night, you're shocked by the speed of traffic. Cars race across elevated freeways, and you soon realize your only chance of survival is to move up in that numbing speed. You try to climb the icy slopes but keep sliding back. The Southern dream of escaping the "unbearable heat of injustice and oppression" dissolves when you discover those slopes do not lead to Dr. King's "leveled valleys and flattened mountains."

Eventually you give up your Sisyphean climb and wander among the concrete pillars beneath the highways. The pillars recall the Greek columns of old plantation houses and may imprison you in a new kind of ghetto—yet you still cling to hope. You don't yet realize you're entering a divided world, a chilling echo of H. G. Wells' The Time Machine: The Eloi are creatures of light, for whom life is effortless—except at night, when they fear the subterranean Morlocks.

As a vagabond, you see our unequal society as a dystopia made real—the forced ghettoization of millions of Black migrants who traveled north with hope, just as today's poor immigrants come to Europe seeking equality. You may see it more humanly than the sociologist. My friends holding my book have had no upward mobility since I met them 42 years ago. They are stuck in the same shacks, generation after generation—literally being run over by roaring trucks and busy drivers.

These highways symbolize not only the struggle of poor immigrants against an inhumane system but also our own powerlessness as we drive through increasingly misanthropic cities. Our racism destroyed thriving Black business districts by plowing highways straight through them—so we could commute easily between white suburbs and downtown jobs.

In the South, oppression was easier to blame on "the other," but in the North I saw the concrete beams in my own eye. After my vagabond years I became a lecturer and soon found myself driving over "the others" as well, just as ghetto residents must to reach work. Or I flew across the country with almost all white businessmen—who spoke proudly of their "best Black friend" while avoiding doing business in the ghettos. I saw the caste hierarchy even more clearly when uniformed Black drivers picked me up in stretch limousines. Through their tinted windows I watched my old friends standing in the neighborhoods we glided past. All oppression is about power and responsibility, and throughout life we keep trading roles—oppressor one moment, oppressed the next.

"The freeways were built through the heart of the Black communities, destroying everything in their path. Our homes were bulldozed, our businesses were displaced, and our families were torn apart. The freeways were a symbol of the brutality of racism and the callous disregard for Black lives." —Angela Davis

2009 - Baton Rouge, LA: the same people are still living in the same shacks on the left, 36 years later, with my book

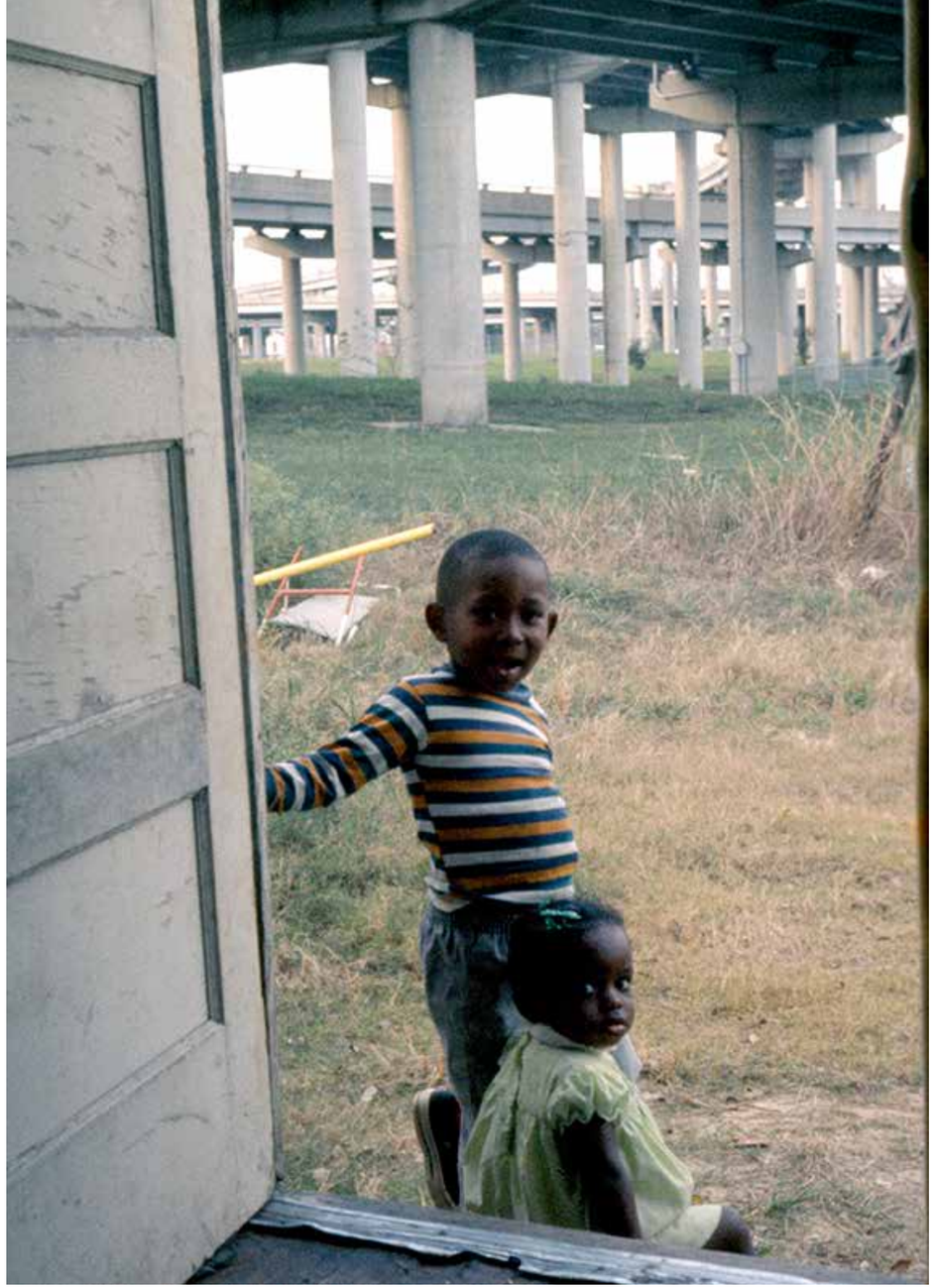
1973 - Baton Rouge, LA

1973 - Boston

1973 - Baton Rouge, LA

1974 - Miami

Note: Black background here



1972 - Miami, FL

1973 - New Orleans

1973 - Baton Rouge, LA

1970 - East St. Louis, IL

1973 - Baton Rouge, LA

1974 - Boone, NC - Below 1974 - New Orleans

Our destructive flight – both at home and abroad

"We build our world by what we choose to see. Racism survives by making suffering invisible." — Nikole Hannah-Jones

"People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster." — James Baldwin

The planet can no longer absorb our unchecked consumption. We are caught in a vicious circle where even "rational" decisions—like military interventions to secure oil—are symptoms of a deeper addiction.

We avoid facing the simple truth: that we, a small slice of humanity, created catastrophic CO_2 emissions in a single century—largely by plundering the earth's cheapest energy sources.

The media soothe us with ads urging us to "get away from it all," masking our environmental and climate racism—the reality that the most vulnerable communities, usually people of color, bear the heaviest consequences of the climate crisis while the least affected continue consuming freely.

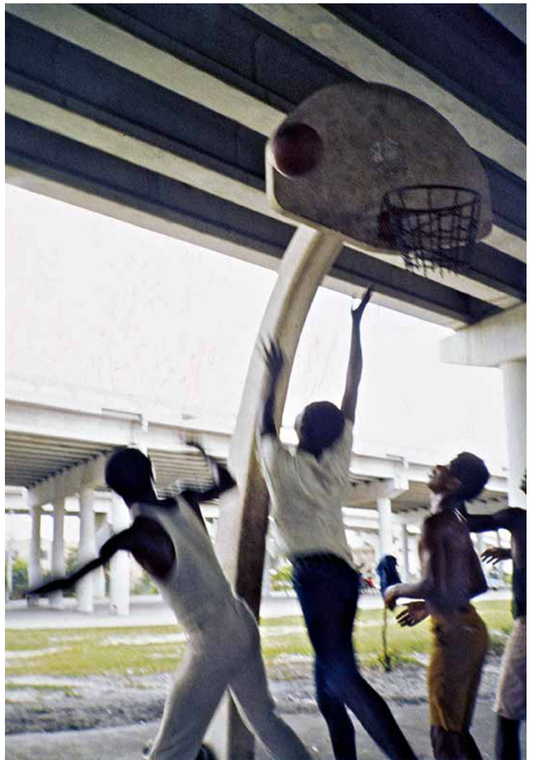
We flee responsibility and betray the future of brown children across the globe. We chauffeur our own children in climate-damaging SUVs to distant private schools—away from Black children in the U.S. and from brown children in Europe A vicious cycle rooted in our flight from the very suffering we created.

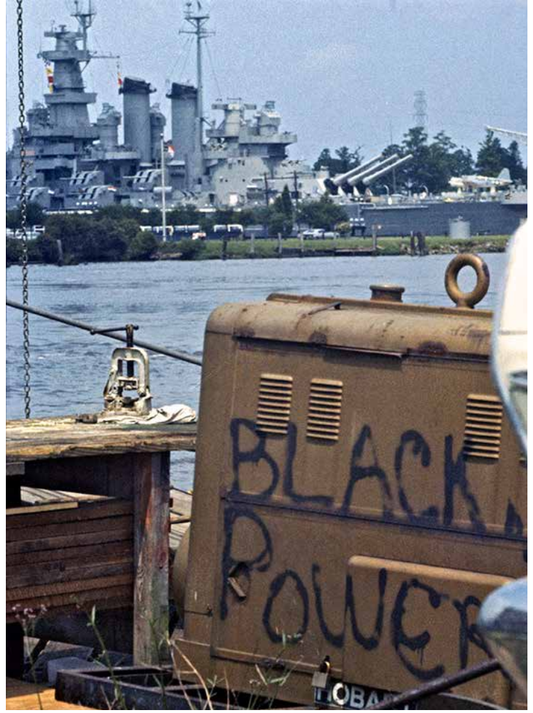
It is a chaotic escape drowned out by the noise of ads and music selling us "needs" that fuel more consumption—and further escape. Fleeing whites spend more on a ski weekend than a family in the underclass earns in a week In that sense we are oppressors—yet we too feel trapped by the same system, and often just as unhappy as those we harm.

For God's sake, you've got to give more power to the people!
There's some people up there hogging everything,
telling lies, giving alibies,
about the people's money and things.
And if they're going to throw it away
they might as well give some to me.
They don't care about the poor,
they have never had misery.
There's some people
who are starving to death
whom they never knew, but only heard of,
and they never had half enough.
If you don't have enough to eat,
how can you think of love?
You don't have time to care
what crimes you're guilty of
For God's sake,
why don't you give more power to the people?

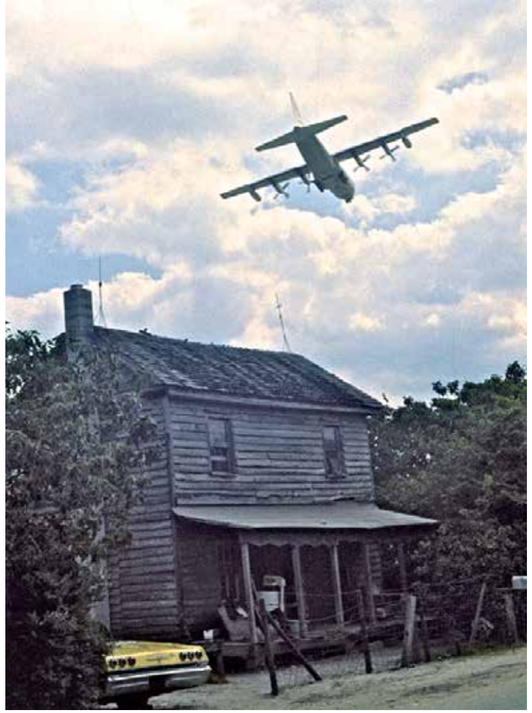
Give more power to the people song by The Chi-Lites - illustrated

Both from 1973 - Baton Rouge, LA





1973 - Norfolk, VA



1974 - New Bern, NC

1973 - rural VA

Our climate racism and militarism undermine real democracy

"It's about time we start respecting the environment. We are all connected. The decisions we make today will affect generations to come." - Janelle Monáe

"There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." – Audre Lorde

"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." — Martin Luther King Jr.

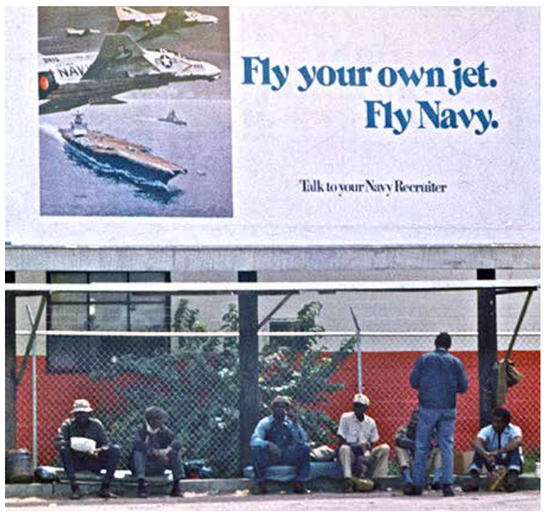
Our consumption traps us in a vicious circle of invented needs.

Our destructive behavior is fundamentally reshaping lives in the Global South, where droughts, floods, and climate-fueled conflicts over land and water push millions toward our borders. When politicians in wealthy countries appeal only to voters' short-term desires—rather than long-term planetary survival—our democracies falter.

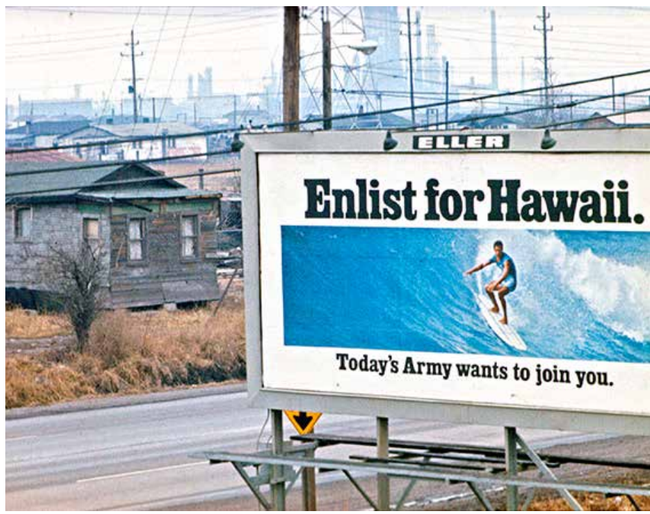
It is almost banal to say that it is not only politicians selling "hot air" to developing nations. WE offload the costs of our lifestyles onto our own children.

What kind of future do we prepare for them when we slowly strip them of empathy as they feel compelled to raise walls and deploy soldiers, to contain both climate refugees and our own angered minorities?

While my parents' generation celebrated the U.S. military for liberating Europe, my generation saw the U.S. bolster dictatorships across the Global South. My prejudice lasted until Clinton's interventions in Haiti and Kosovo, when I "integrated" myself into the US military in the hope it could again defend democracy and freedom—as we saw in Ukraine until Trump's betrayal.



1973 - Richmond, VA



1974 - Charleston, SC

Our Military-Industrial Theft From the Poor

"Wars are fought for oil, but the poor drown in the floods it creates." — Nnimmo Bassey

When does the price of national security become a theft from the people it claims to defend?

In Norfolk, VA, one of the world's largest naval ports, this starving woman tried to get to a hospital because she had chest pains, but she had no money for an ambulance.

Each morning, through grimy windows, she watched billion-dollar warships rise from dry docks. She had no electricity, no radio, no TV—only the sight of a Navy vessel burning twenty times more energy in one minute (267 gallons) than her oil lamp uses in a year (12 gallons).

As Eisenhower warned us:

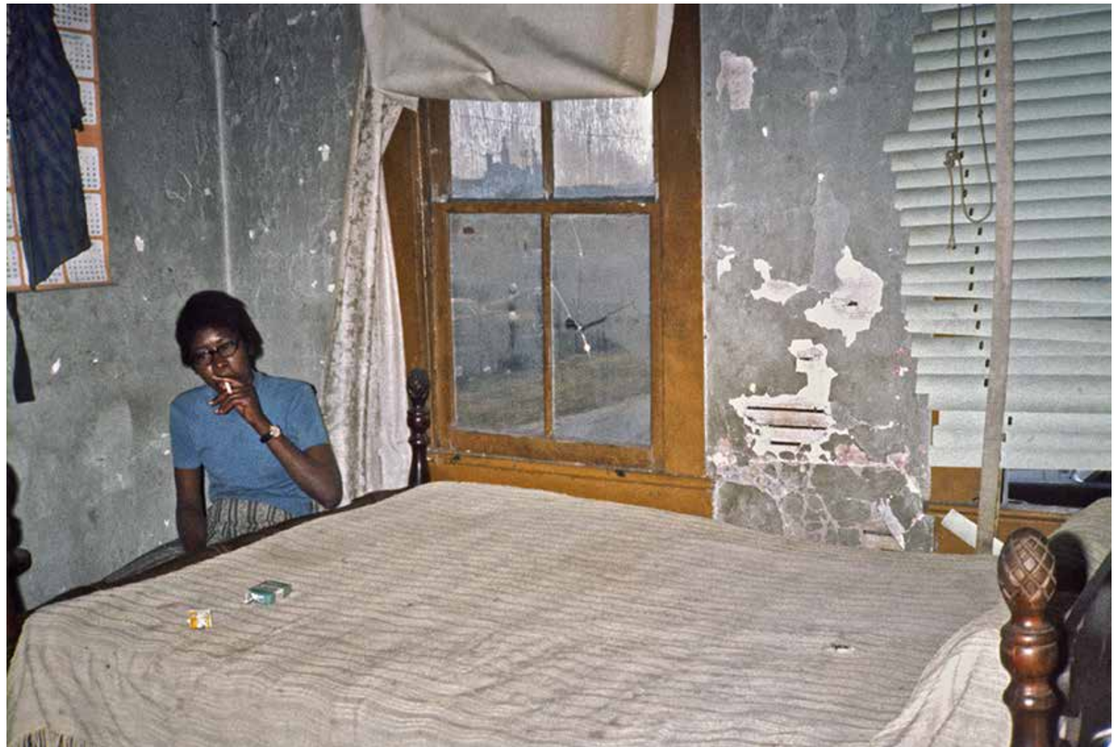
Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

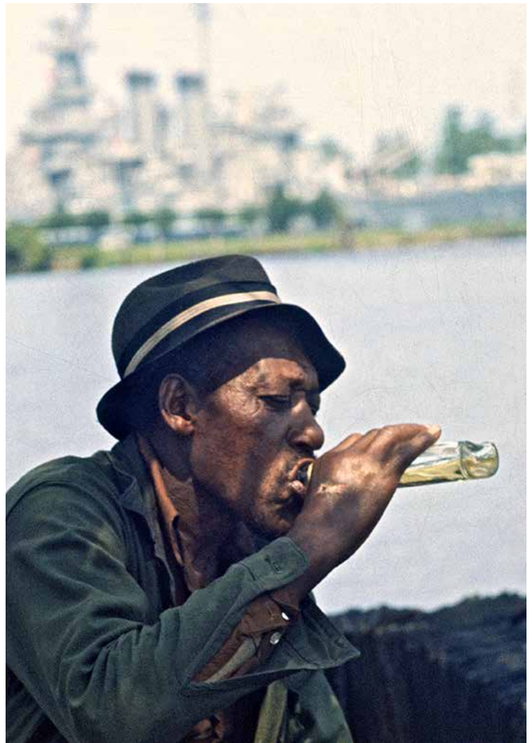
Both from 1973 - Norfolk, VA

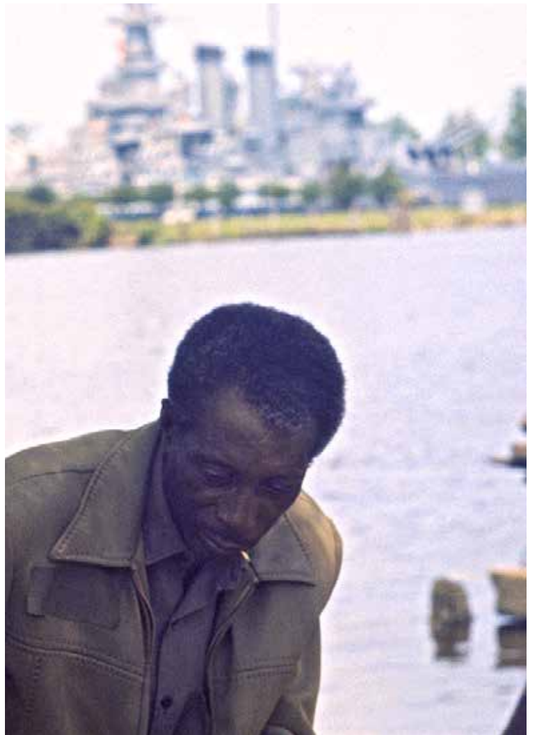
Statesmen are trying to see who's got
the power to kill the most.
When they are tired of power
the world is going to be a ghost.
They know we're not satisfied
the way they scream and holler.
They give us a promise
and throw in a few more dollars.
There's no price for happiness,
there's no price for love.
Up goes the price of living
and you're right back where you were.
Now we're going to get on up
and get some more of it.
For God's sake,
give more power to the people...

1985 - Buffalo, NY and 1973 - general Westmoreland in Charleston, SC

Below both from 1973 - Norfolk, VA







1971 - NYC

1973 - NYC

Do our Discarded Dreams Echo Disposable Society?

"Pollution is violence. And so is the silence around it." — Majora Carter, environmental justice activist from the South Bronx

I often heard whites say that ghetto blacks throw their garbage in the backyard because in the South they were used to throwing it out the kitchen window to the pigs or goats.
I see it, rather, as a mute protest against a dominant caste that has always dumped its waste onto the bodies, homes, and futures of the poor. For generations, we have placed toxic landfills next to Black neighborhoods—from the South Bronx to East L.A., from Detroit's Southwest side to Louisiana's Cancer Alley. We've ringed ghettos with refineries and chemical plants, condemning children to asthma, cancers, poisoned groundwater, and houses worth less than the soil they stand on. Or backyard dumped the historic black neighborhoods of Atlanta's West End and Vine City, Alabama's North Birmingham, or as seen here in South Chicago.

And the story repeats. Today, the world's richest man, Elon Musk, is building one of the most energy-hungry supercomputers on earth—right in the middle of a historic Black neighborhood in Memphis. His company, xAI, powers it with gas-fired turbines without the residents' approval. They spent decades fighting to remove old toxic factories and are now choking again— this time to train Musk's chatbot, Grok.
This is climate destruction disguised as progress. While the rest of the world is being asked to cut back, Musk is pumping CO_2 into the atmosphere – because artificial intelligence apparently requires real sacrifices. (Perhaps out).

1991 - Bronx, NY

Once more, Black children pay for white ambition. No accountability. Just another powerful man dumping noise, heat, and poison where he assumes nobody who matters lives. Privileged whites often only discover their own environmental racism when through gentrification they displace blacks—yet again—and suddenly find themselves living in piles of trash, such as in East Harlem and San Francisco's Bayview–Hunters Point.
And our dumping doesn't stop at national borders. We ship mountains of electronic waste—lead, cadmium, mercury—to Africa. We scatter plastic across Asia and send asbestos-laden ships to die on the shores of Bangladesh and Pakistan.
We poison Central America with medical and radioactive waste. We flood African markets with our "donations" of used clothing, crushing local industries while congratulating ourselves for recycling.
Our privileges are propped up by a global system making other people's neighborhoods—other people's children—absorb what we refuse to see. We don't just discard objects; we discard lives. And our trash always travels downhill.

1983 - Chicago

1974 - Interstate 95 in VA

2013 - 4th St, Los Angeles

1975 - Harlem, NY

1973 - NYC

1973 - NYC

1972 - NYC

Disposable society has thrown away the
best in me.
It's thrown away sincerity,
the keystone of integrity.
Disposable to throw away,
buy something new another day.
There is nothing made that's made to stay.
Planned obsolescence will make you pay:
paper plates, cardboard skates, plastic
silverware,
automobiles with disposable wheels,
wigs instead of hair, that's how it is.
Disposable the way you love,
not exactly what you're thinking of.
Dispose of me when you are through
for fear that I'll dispose of you.
Disposable your closest friend,
you're supposed to love right to the end.
Your rigid mind won't let you bend.
You're further gone than you pretend ...

Disposable Society song by
Esther Philips - illustrated

1978 - NYC

Christmas in New York

"New York's the lonesomest place in the world if you don't know anybody." Nella Larsen from the Harlem Renaissance after returning from Denmark

New York is an inhuman, cold city. You have to live with the alienation, or be destroyed. In my journey I always try to go the whole way with people I get attached to, but in New York again and again I must break off with people prematurely and thus abandon the human connection that has arisen between us. I experienced this most strongly this Christmas, which was even more intense than last year, when I was held up by three Puerto Ricans on Fourth Street on Christmas Eve.

This year I had just hitch-hiked in from Alabama, but couldn't find any of my friends and ended up on the street down in the Bowery on Christmas Eve. I got to talking with a bum who had lighted a fire to keep warm. He must have been a bum for a long time, for his curly hair was all in knots that could not possibly be combed out. We soon became good friends. He was one of those bums who can talk; the worst are those who can only communicate through the eyes.

As we sat there talking, it occurred to us that it was Christmas Eve, and we became more and more sentimental. When we exchanged memories of our childhood Christmases it wasn't just the smoke from the fire that brought tears to our eyes. He had been married, had children, and had once been quite happy, he thought, but had suddenly become unemployed, after which his family disintegrated and he became an alcoholic.

We shared a flask and gradually became rather drunk. A crazy guy started throwing bottles at us, smashing them against the wall next to us. At last it became too much for my friend, and he took a piece of burning wood and beat the man until he disappeared.

This happened around Delancey Street, where there is always a bunch of prostitutes standing on the corner. Bums, just like other people, have a desire to find somebody lower than themselves, and during our conversation he kept returning to his indignation over these prostitutes being out even on Christmas Eve. Whenever I have drunk heavily with bums they have fallen asleep first, even though we drank the same amount. He, too, fell asleep around ten or eleven p.m.

I wondered whether I should stay and keep watch over him, since we had become good friends. I have so often seen poor black and Puerto Rican housewives with children and shopping bags walk over and trample on dead-drunk bums or kick them and hurry home to the pots and pans—a typical manifestation of their lack of self-esteem or outright self-hatred. But since the streets were rather empty that night, I decided to leave him after putting a good load of scrap wood on the fire.

I wandered down to my favorite area around Avenue B, the "free-fire zone," where there are always fights between the Puerto Ricans and the blacks, but which I like because there is an almost even racial balance among whites, browns, and blacks.

Here I saw Larry standing in a doorway. We started talking, and he told me he had just been thrown out by his white wife. When we realized we were in the same boat, we decided to go together to find a place to stay.
First we bought a bottle of wine. Then we promised each other that if one of us found a place, he wouldn't take it without the other. Larry was more extroverted and eloquent, but I was white, so we figured we could compensate for each other.

Larry was the type who had to rap with everybody in the street. He had been in a respectable marriage for four years, but confided that the whole time he had really been a street person at heart. We had not walked far before we had a whole flock of street people with us; most of them were bums. At one point there were five whom Larry had promised he would find a place to stay and a bottle of wine. Two walked on crutches. A third flailed the air as if swatting mosquitoes.

I was convinced we could never find a place to sleep for this whole crowd, but since something unexpected often turned up in such situations, I didn't say anything. We asked the few people we met if they knew a place to stay, concentrating on Jews, as the others were celebrating Christmas and we assumed they would not have room in their hearts. Besides, Jews are traditionally hospitable. Since I was the only white, it was up to me to handle the Jews, but all efforts were in vain. One man said that if it really was true that I was a foreigner he would gladly take me home, but he dared not, and instead gave me six dollars for the YMCA.

TV-movie from 1992 about my continuing friendship with the homeless in New York

1972 - Bowary, NY

1974 - NYC

1972 - Bowary, NY

1971 - Bowery, NY

1978 - NYC. Revisit to Marisol Escobar and her fish to give her my book

Naturally we bought apple wine, and things now looked a bit brighter. But we still found no place to sleep, and the wine made the bums loud and aggressive. The man swatting mosquitoes began shadowboxing, and people fled.

It was close to two o'clock when I was sent into the Broome Street Bar to find new "victims." As I checked out the crowd, a dark-haired woman came over and stared into my eyes in a strange way. Then she said, very slowly, "You have fish eyes." I thought she was on some drug and tried to look away. Then she said, "I want you to come and live with me." I asked whether I could bring a couple of my friends. She said no. "Then I can't come with you," I said, but she gave me her address anyway.

I stayed with the others a couple more hours, but couldn't get her out of my thoughts. The situation looked completely hopeless. We were plastered by then. Over in the piles of corrugated cardboard on Mercer Street we lost one of the guys on crutches, who had fallen asleep. It was raining heavily, and I was almost unconscious, so I slipped away around five. I was embarrassed and ashamed for days. But a week later I ran into Larry on Washington Square.

He told me he had also left the others and had found a huge fat white woman in the West Village, where he lived now. That comforted me, and we remained good friends.

I went back to the strange woman. She lived in a huge loft on Washington Street and had a studio on Broadway as big as a football field. Her bathtub was a palette-shaped swimming pool. All she wanted was my company. For three days we sat from dawn to dusk staring into each other's eyes. Everywhere hung plaster fish, gaping foolishly down at us. But there was certainly more life in them than in her. She was 40 years old, born in the ocean, and could only communicate with fish. She had nothing else to say. I was curious to find out who she was, so one night while she was asleep I searched through some of her papers and found out that she was the world-famous artist Marisol Escobar, who had been on the covers of Time and Look, though her last exhibition of fish sculptures had gotten bad reviews.

She was swimming in money. One day I had to sign as a witness on a contract for several thousand dollars. Half the year she spent in the Gulf of Mexico, diving down to her little friends.

Nevertheless, she never gave me so much as a piece of bread, and I was getting more and more desperate from hunger. Morning and night I had to follow her to restaurants and sit across from her while she ate. The thought of giving me food never occurred to her.

As I never ask people for food, I one day blurted out an indirect hint: "Did it ever occur to you that all your art is entirely for rich folks and isn't benefiting poor people at all?" No answer. And still no food. She had a refrigerator, so at one point while she was asleep, I took the liberty to see if there was any food in it. I got a shock when several big frozen cod-like fish came tumbling out – and nothing else. If I hadn't been so hungry, I would have had more patience with her.

Then suddenly my rescuer appeared. It was Erica, who had helped Marisol polish the fish sculptures. She was laughing and alive, and it was wonderful to hear a human being again. She understood my situation instantly, and as elegantly as a fish slipped seven dollars into my hand. Later she whispered that I could move in with her. When Marisol fell asleep that evening, I fled to Erica, who lived in a tiny fire-escape apartment on 11th Street.

1978 NYC. Marisol exhibited the fish at MoMa Louisiana in 2025

1991 – NYC - Homeless cities on the Lower East Side

Erica, whom I am now living with, is quite simply a find. She is a lesbian but does not have the animosity toward men that characterized so many New York lesbians. It always makes me happy when I can have a good relationship with a lesbian.
Erica, like me, can't understand the necessity of hating men.
It is certainly true that both heterosexual and homosexual American men are alarmingly aggressive, but one must still try to understand the oppression and the society that created this John Wayne culture.

I think Black men in particular suffer from this culture. I always wash dishes in people's homes, but I have almost stopped doing it in Black homes, where it often embarrasses the women: they don't know what to do with a man doing dishes. Isn't it disingenuous of me to try to change their culture when they still have to live with the oppression?

When it comes down to it, white women have the same attitude. Time and again I am invited home by single white women who, unlike single women in Europe, almost always have a double bed and therefore put me at their side. What is shocking is how unable they are to deal with a non-aggressive man.

After two or three days they usually ask, "Have you always been gay?" or more often, "Let's go out and get drunk."
No doubt they would be uncomfortable if a guest went straight to their refrigerator and ate all the meat, yet American women seem equally uncomfortable if a man does not walk right into their own flesh.

With Black women I sometimes find it necessary to modify my passive rule about not violating people's hospitality with some "affirmative action." They often do everything in their power to humiliate a "soft" or non-aggressive man, which nips any chance of a more meaningful relationship in the bud.

Erica is a different woman. She has made me into the epitome of male chauvinism: my function in her home is, in fact, to be a pimp. Erica is a stylish prostitute—a call-girl—and it has become my job to answer the telephone, sort out obscene calls, and ask the nice ones to call again at five for a second sorting. She has an ad in the sex magazine Screw, which apparently all businessmen read, because the phone rings nonstop. The finals start around 6 p.m., when I choose the nicest voice and arrange a meeting in a hotel for 7 p.m.. We take a taxi, usually to the Upper East Side, as we stick to nice businessmen.

My job is to sit in the lobby drinking Coke for about an hour, and if she hasn't come down by then, I go up and knock.
On the way home we usually eat Italian ice cream, which Erica loves. But the most fantastic thing about her is that she's not an average hooker.

She loves to help people and give them warmth in the midst of this coldness. She says most of her customers are extremely lonely and need not so much sex as warmth. Seen with typical male eyes she is no physical beauty—abnormally thin, flat-chested, with curly red hair—but she has such inner charm that men cannot resist her. Almost everyone gives her a hundred dollars, though we agreed on seventy-five, and only one has ever complained. Often she doesn't even go to bed with them, but gives physical and especially spiritual massage. She has bought me many rolls of film, but for good reasons I have refused money.

In the daytime she goes to singing lessons and dance classes or sits for hours making coffee services out of foam rubber. Every cup, saucer, and spoon is perfect. She has glass cupboards filled with foam rubber china, like those in respectable bourgeois homes. She is a fantastic inspiration for me.

1973 - NYC

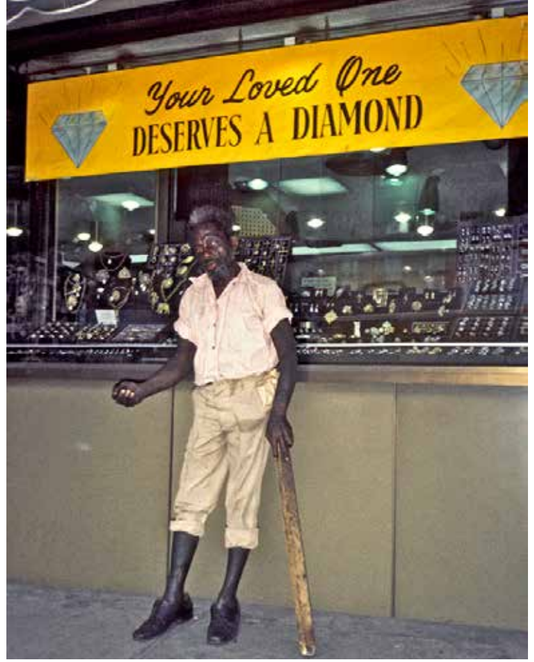
One day a man had been mugged outside and left lying there for a long time. Erica was the only one who bothered to call an ambulance. None came, and people just stood staring stupidly at the half-dead man. She kept telephoning.
There were only Puerto Ricans living there, so it usually took up to an hour before police or ambulances arrived. Then she called the police and said a white man was being attacked by several Blacks and Puerto Ricans outside. Two police cars and an ambulance came immediately. This trick is common in New York and seems to work every time. I have often seen Erica give a whole day's wages to people in need, taking money from rich businessmen and giving it directly to beggars.

Another night we saw a bum in his fifties asking for help to buy wine and for someone to talk to. We sat with him for hours, and he said he was about to get delirium tremens and was afraid he would die. Erica said we would go with him to the hospital, and he cried for joy. He had waited ten years for this moment. We took him in a taxi to St. Vincent's Hospital and sat in the waiting room for two hours.
He cried the whole time. Then we were told they would not accept him. He had been drinking and became impossible, screaming and yelling. I shouted something about being from a civilized country with free hospitals and health care. The police were called and we were thrown out.
We took a cab to the emergency in Bellevue and sat there among screaming, hysterical, suicidal people. We stayed until six in the morning, but nothing happened. The man drank his entire bottle, sat on the floor crying with his head in Erica's lap, begging us not to leave. Several times he urinated in his pants, forming a pool around him as he took his penis out and let it hang there. Erica kept tucking it back in. .
Most patients had by then fled out. He began vomiting everywhere— the most peculiar slimy and stinking puke I have seen in a long time.
Then even the nurses fled. We tried to clean it up. Finally, exhausted, and promised that he would be admitted, we went home and slept.

Two days later I went back to Bellevue with cigarettes but was told that no one had been admitted under his name. I was furious and sad and dared not tell Erica.
New York is a city that does not permit human beings to be human. To survive here, you must learn to leave others to their fates. Erica is not from New York, so I will live with her a while longer. But soon I will return to the warmth of the South. New York's cold does me in every time.

Letter to an American friend

1973 - WTC - my first loving glimpse of NYC, every time I hitchhiked up from the south



1974 - NYC

From Southern Warmth to Northern Walls

"I think that feeling of displacement, of not belonging anywhere, is a very common experience for people of the diaspora, for people who are removed from their ancestral homelands." - Yaa Gyasi

When love becomes a sales item and our humanity is sold out, we begin to sense the shadows in us that created the ghetto.

My vagabonding through the world's most advanced disposable system became an inward journey in which I couldn't always distinguish people from the system that shaped them. I had to ask whether the warmth I received was genuine or a superficial hospitality the system had taught—a need for disposable friendship.
Yet even being discarded after use was preferable to the human coldness I'd known in Europe, which never would've given a vagabond a chance.
I learned that where a system is most oppressive (as in South Africa under apartheid), you often find the greatest human warmth—a warmth we shouldn't throw away while seeking a more just system.

Though life in the Northern states was more just, I constantly had to hitchhike back to the humanness of the South to survive emotionally (as many Blacks do). The liberal North invited Blacks in the '40s and '50s for labor, just as Northern Europe invited brown workers in the '60s.

But we didn't need them as human beings and gradually abandoned them in huge ghettos. Our rising insecurity under globalization now produces a deep, accumulating pain that is reshaping the world. Never before have we forced so many into ghettos so fast. What took Europe centuries to inflict on the Jews, we have repeated within decades upon millions of Muslims.

Ghettoization in many countries leads to ethnic cleansing. Few minorities are as ghettoized as Blacks in the U.S., where in cities like Detroit and Chicago up to 94% blacks now live in all-Black neighborhoods.

Our disposable society—backyard dumping both things and human beings—has killed love by isolating and alienating whole populations. But it cannot silence the scream of pain and emptiness from those we disposed of—as can be discerned everywhere in the ghetto and the underground.

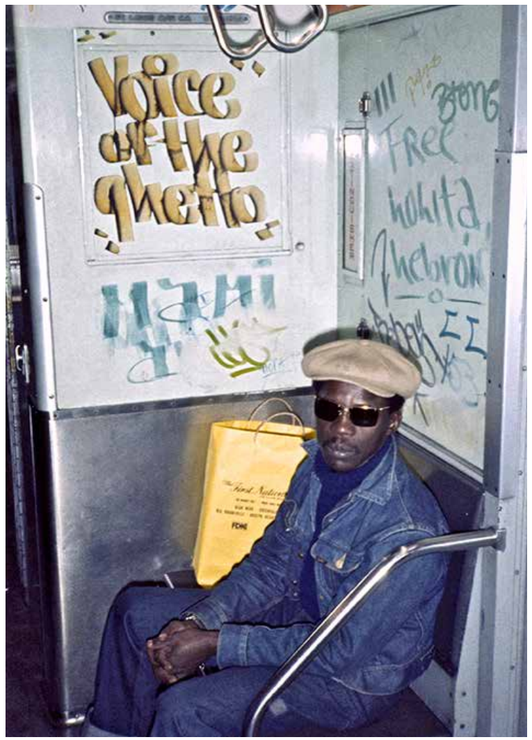
Voice of the Ghetto

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
- Maya Angelou

1973 - NYC

1974 - NYC

1974 - Vanessa Guider here later committed suicide jumping from window



1973 - NYC

My original song here - *I am, I said by Neil Diamond* - illustrated with my graffiti photos

1974 - Bronx, NY - "Crime Don't pay"

1973 - NYC

1973 - NYC

1974 - NYC

1974 - NYC

1973 - NYC

The Ghetto as Muse: A Critique of my Liberal Paternalism

"The liberal is a man who feels a great deal of pity for the unfortunate, but does nothing about it." - James Baldwin

"Liberalism is like a boat. It's always leaning in the direction of privilege." - Audre Lorde

The system—or, the sum total of our daily repressive thinking—uses repressive tolerance to deal with the pushback from our victims, mouth gaging the scream from the underground by acknowledging its artistic value, by exalting it.

The oppressed are granted safe conduct to exhibit in art galleries for the better-off and better-thinking among us—those of us with sympathetic words about the "problems of the ghetto" and "our immigrants," with benevolent sermons on hunger and overpopulation in the Third World. Yet despite all our high-flying talk about "integrating them," we ourselves flee to the suburbs—our kids don't go to "black schools"—resulting in further ghettoization.

We brag vociferously about having a black friend here and a Muslim friend there, but we don't wonder why blacks in the US or immigrants in Denmark rarely come to these art palaces. Without batting an eye, we accept black waiters carrying on the master-slave relationship at these functions. As the buffer troops of oppression, we can absorb criticism of the system, distort it, and disarm it by raising it to the level of art. This is also what will happen with my photographs.

Affluent liberals, whom I came to hate and love at the same time because they're so much a side of myself, will give me all possible support in publishing and exhibiting my critique of society, shocked at the things I've seen in America. They feel ashamed because I've crossed a threshold, they feel they ought to have crossed themselves but, with their paralyzing fear of those they've helped to ghettoize, could not.

1975 - Los Angeles

1975 - Los Angeles

1973 - NYC

1975 - Los Angeles

All three 1974 - Harlem, NY

Liberalism's Spectacle of Oppression

"White liberalism is a philosophy that promotes the interest of white people under the guise of helping black people." - Stokely Carmichael

Such people exist in all societies, squawking about the necessity for change to help ghettos and underdeveloped countries "up." But when election day comes in the U.S., their promises end up in the status-quo wastebasket with votes for the Democrats (or, in Europe, various social democratic parties).

I can't avoid feeling that I too exploited the victims, for I know that these pictures won't benefit them at all. We'll feel briefly sentimental, realizing that our underclass suffers like this, but we won't change our lifestyle. We won't give up our climate-destroying motorhomes, SUVs, central air-conditioning, charter trips, or distant private schools in order to redistribute the earth's goods.

And so my pictures become an emotional catharsis. I knew this—and underclass Blacks told me so, having no illusions about appealing to the "inner goodness" of their white oppressors. Yet I persisted and have thus betrayed both Blacks and the Third World, making this page the only one in the book almost all African Americans can agree with. I've created an entertaining emotional release, strengthening an unjust system. I'm as hypocritical as the art snobs because I'm playing by their rules. When my critique grew too "radical," they turned their backs.

I'm therefore forced to water it down so that it risks becoming a teary, condescending, "paternalistic" vagabond tale about suffering in the ghetto and our unfortunate shadow sides—such as the following sentimental journey into Harlem, not far from the stronghold of these liberals, the Museum of Modern Art.

1974 - Bronx, NY

1980 - NYC

The song *Give a damn* by Spanky and the Gang - illustrated with my photos

A Tale of Two Harlems: The View from the Outside and the Inside

"The ghetto is a place where hope is hard to find and despair is easy." - Langston Hughes in poem "Harlem"

If you take the train with me
uptown through the misery
of ghetto streets
in morning light
where it is always night:
Take a window seat,
put down your Times
you can read between the lines,
just read the faces
that you meet beyond the windowpane:
And it might begin to teach you
how to give a damn about your fellow man!

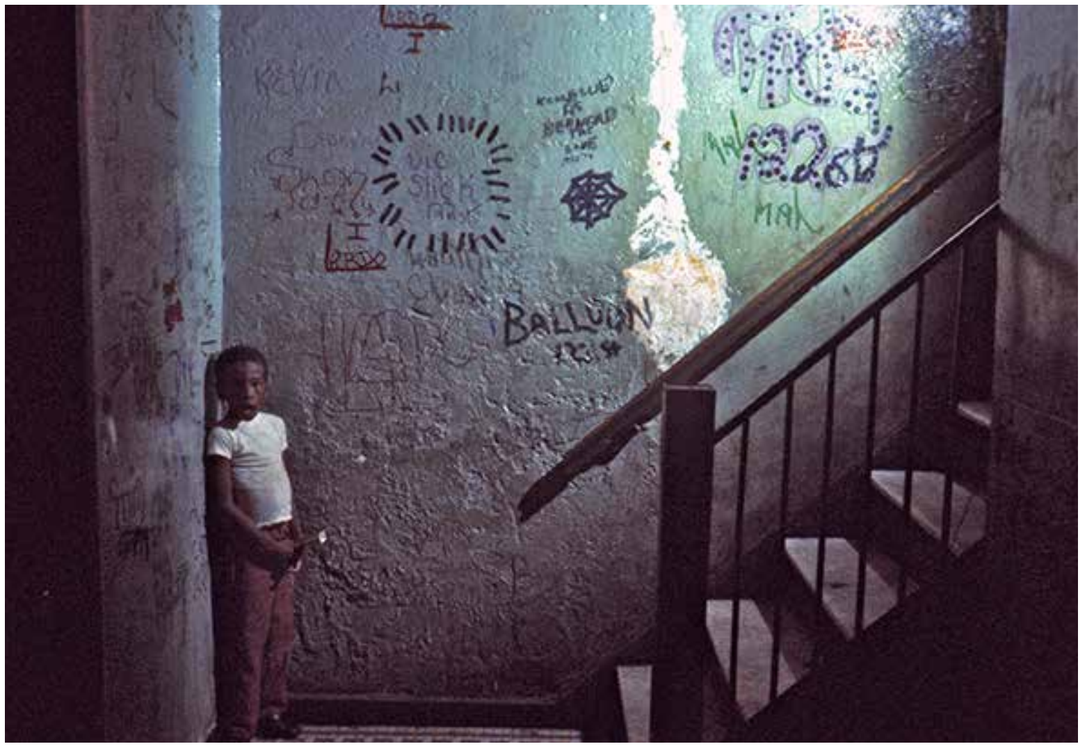
1974 - Harlem, NY

1974 - Bronx, NY

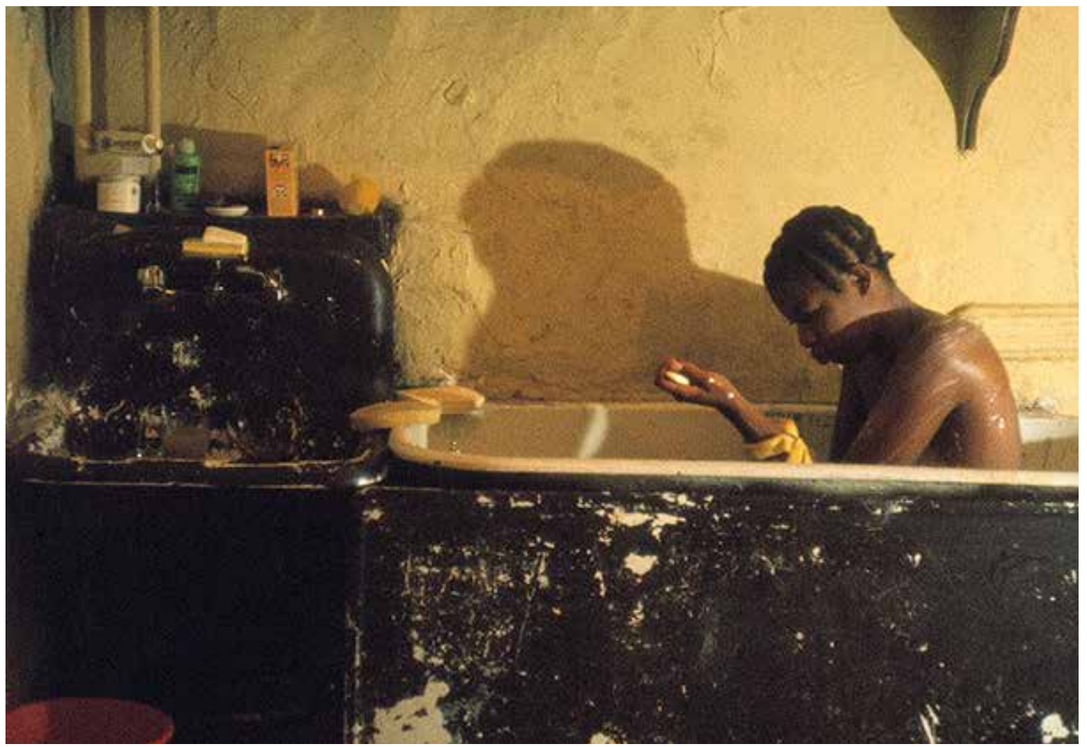
1974 - Harlem, NY

1974 - NYC

Note: Sort baggrund her



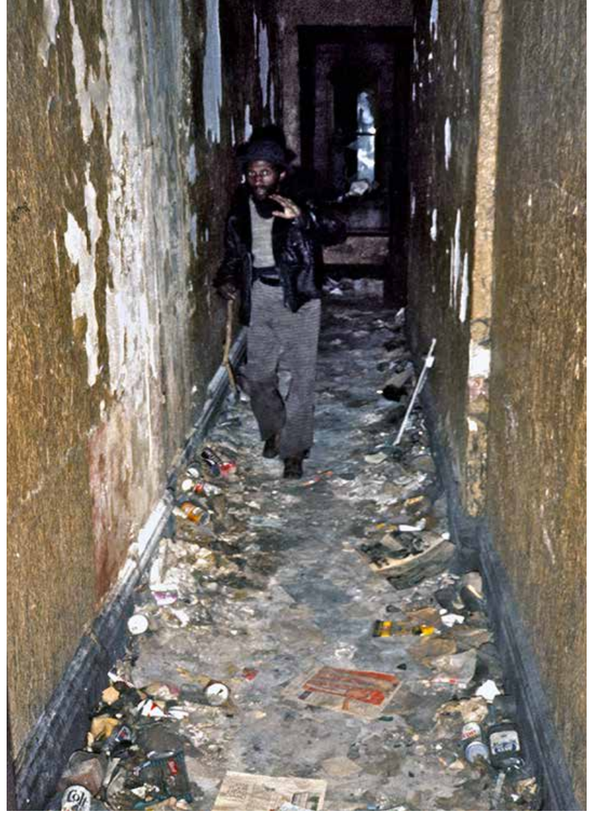
1974 - Harlem, NY



1972 - NYC

1973 - Harlem, NY

1974 - Harlem, NY



1973 - Harlem, NY

1991 - Harlem, NY

1992 - Harlem, NY

Harlem's Echoes: Between Life and Afterlife

"In Harlem, danger was always lurking in the shadows, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.....you were either a player or a pawn. The choice was yours." - Colson Whitehead in Harlem Shuffle

In Harlem in the 1970s, everything is Black except the stores—owned not by locals but by white and Arab immigrants (once, mostly Jews). The street people like to point out that the only businesses owned by Black Harlemites are the countless funeral homes. White undertakers refuse Black bodies, they say, and so death becomes one of the few reliable paths into the middle class.

For death is as ubiquitous in Harlem as the fear haunting everyone beneath sporadic uneasy laughter. Yet I, as the ever-present invisible Whitey, feel safer here than many Blacks do; for as always, anger turns inward, toward fellow victims, not toward the distant oppressor.

This funeral home next to a drug rehabilitation center illustrates the choices in Harlem—between death or an enslaved life under The Man. Thousands of addicts choose the door on the left. They know that if they choose the door on the right, they'll be "re-habilitated"—returned to the same unbearable conditions that drove them to drugs—or "up-habilitated," taught how to numb themselves enough to survive the ghetto's jungle.

They subjugate themselves to The Man's blame-the-victim slavery: fix yourself, not the world that broke you.

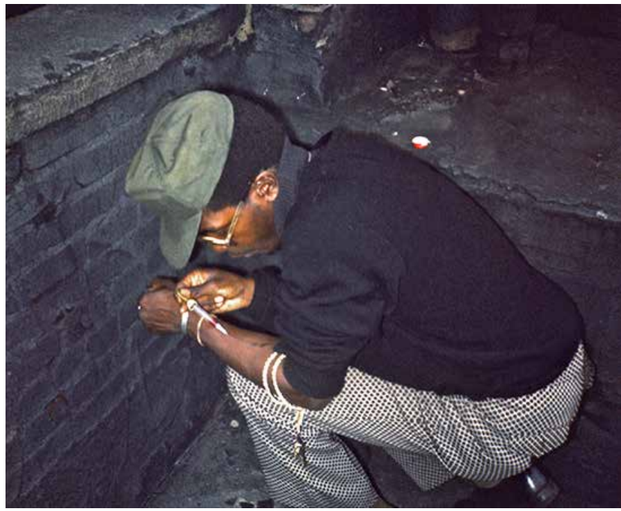
This woman embodies Harlem's impossible choices. An attacker forced his way into her apartment and tried to kill her with a knife. She escaped by leaping out a third-floor window—surviving, but crippled for life.

1995 - NYC

1992 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY



1974 - NYC

In the Shadows of the American Way of Life

"If white people haven't killed you yet, you can do what you want. You didn't have to reach a hundred years to get to that place. In a world this low, dumb, and cruel, every day white people ain't killed you yet is a win."
Colson Whitehead in Crook Manifesto about Harlem in the 1970's

The Americans I feel the most for are the addicts—people too sensitive, too human, to survive the brutal American drive for success. They are not only victims of that violence; they can hit back with the same viciousness the "American way of life" injected into them. Many times, on New York rooftops, I helped these bound souls tie off.

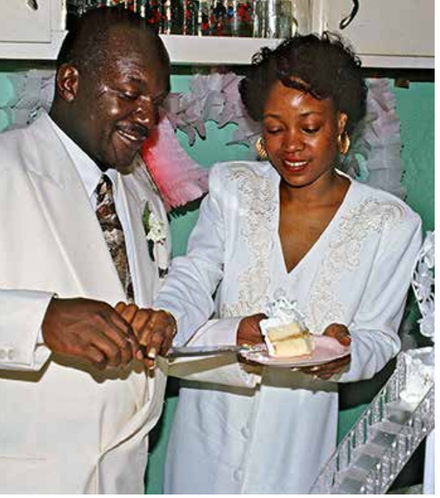
Every day on certain Harlem corners you see thousands of addicts waiting for heroin. At night not even the police enter these neighborhoods.

From the "shooting galleries"—condemned buildings taken over by junkies—we sometimes had an unbelievable view of the Empire State Building's "big needle."

Inside, they are "shooting up" and "shooting down" anyone suspected of being a cop or a "bustman." The penalty for addiction and the petty crimes it forces—being a victim—is the same as for murder. Mandatory life. So they have no real choice. Act like a victim or an executioner; the sentence is identical. The galleries are therefore among the most dangerous places in the city.

This man, who'd been a heroin addict for 16 years. Malnourished, with open sores across his body, he couldn't find a better vein than the one hidden under a foul-smelling bandage on his leg. He suffered terribly and knew he had less than two years to live. He had nothing left to lose and begged me to publish these pictures—hoping they might scare young people away from drugs.

1973 - Harlem, NY

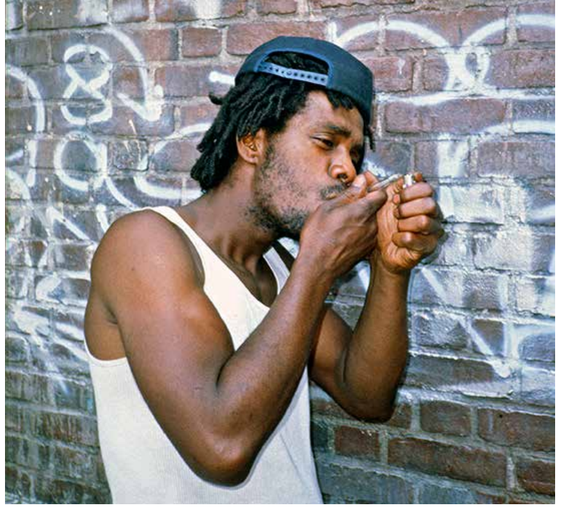


1985 - Harlem, NY

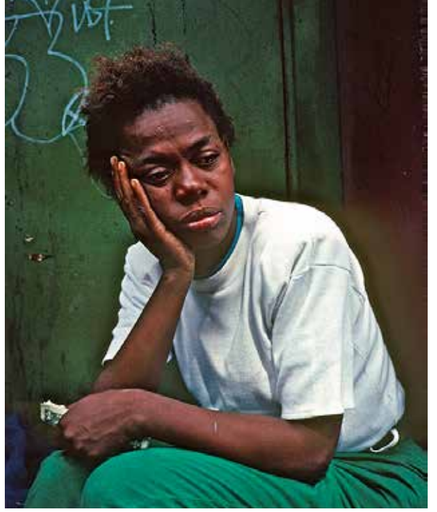
Losing Friends to Crack

I thought I'd seen the worst in the '70s, when I'd learned to knock guns out of the hands of slow heroin addicts. But nothing prepared me for the devastation of the crack epidemic in the '90s, when victims fired wildly during their paranoid few minutes of high and constantly broke into my van or robbed their own families to feed the habit.

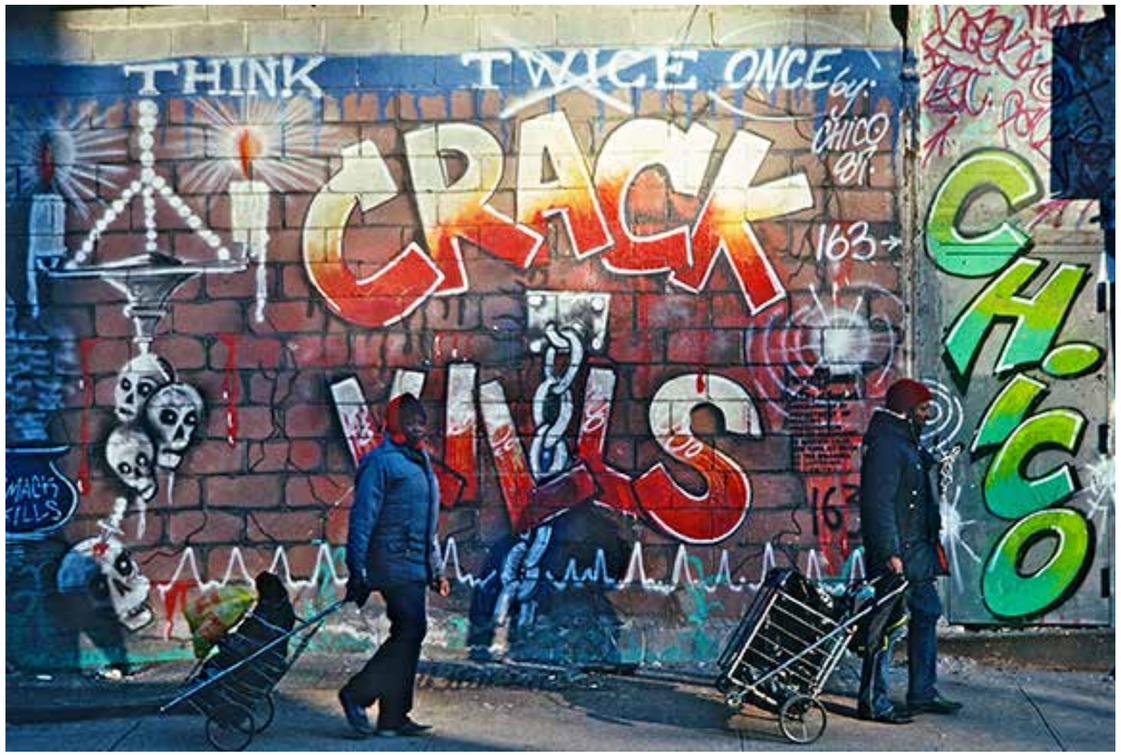
Many of my closest friends succumbed. I'd known Robert Yard for years, and shortly after his wedding in Harlem, his wife fell into crack. I watched him fight to save her and their marriage as her life spiraled into crime, prostitution, and prison. I lost many other friends after 2000, when white gentrification pushed long-time Harlem residents out



1992 - NYC

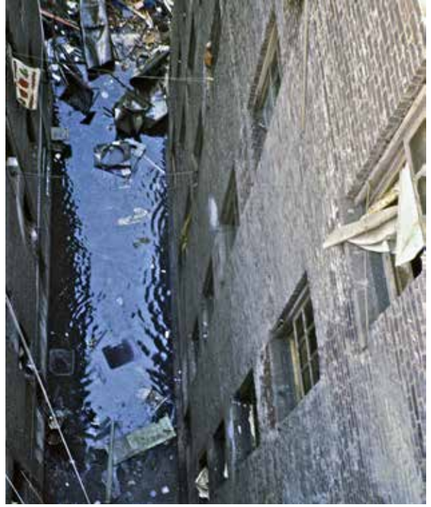


1991 - NYC



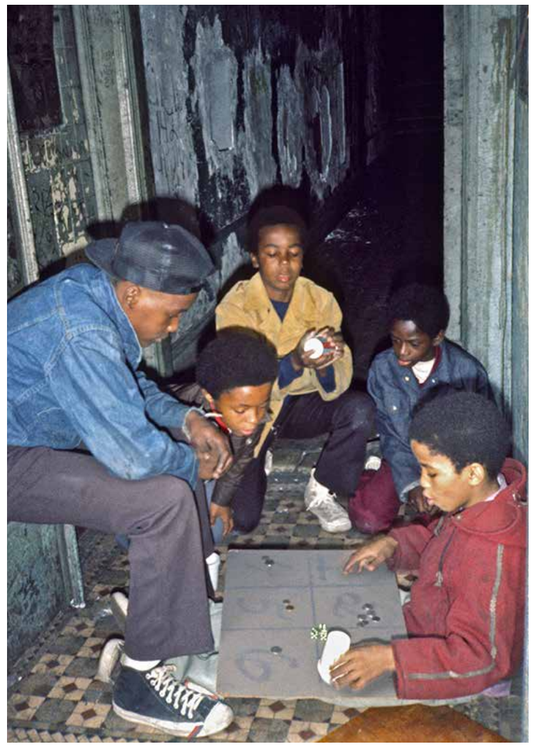
1991 - NYC

1991 - NYC



1974 - Harlem, NY

1989 - Harlem, NY

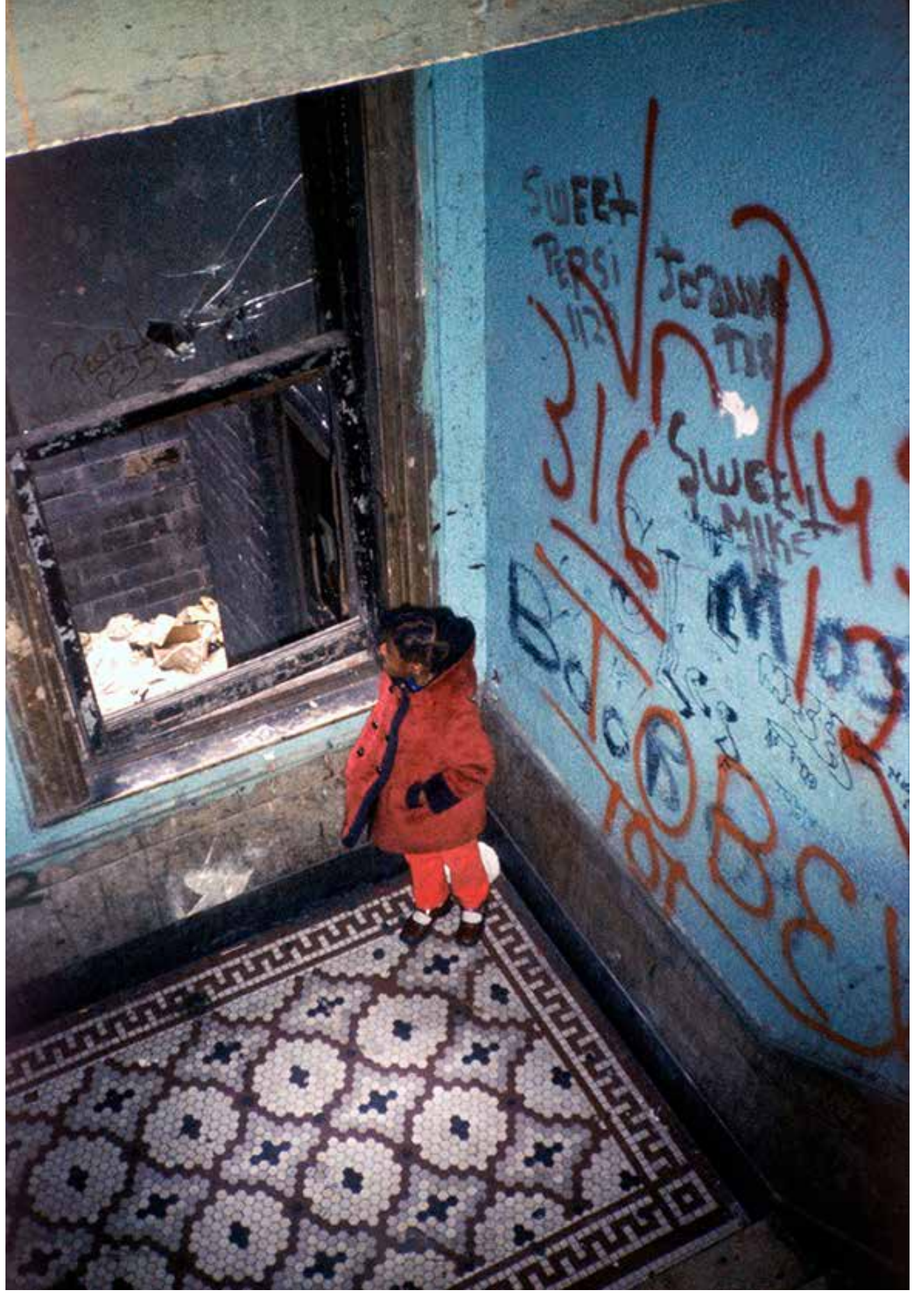


Both from 1974 - Harlem, NY

Lullabies of the Ghetto: The Lost Childhoods

"Harlem is where dreams go to die."
- Lorraine Hansberry

Or put your girl to sleep sometimes
with rats instead of nursery rhymes
with hunger and your other children
by her side.
And wonder if you'll share your bed
with something else that must be fed
for fear may lie beside you
or it may sleep down the hall.
And it might begin to teach you
how to give a damn
about your fellow man!



1974 - Bronx, NY

Give a damn II. - illustrated with my photos of Harlem's children

Note: Sort baggrund her

1973 - Bronx, NY

1973 - NYC

1972 - Harlem, NY

Are we killing children with PTSD through our negative thinking?

"Harlem was a place of endless possibilities and crushing despair, where a man could rise from the ashes or fall into the abyss. It was a place where the lines between hope and despair were perpetually blurred." - Colson Whitehead, "Harlem Shuffle"

Come and see how well despair
is seasoned by the stifling air.
See your ghetto in the good old sizzling summer time.
Suppose the streets were all on fire,
the flames like tempers leaping higher,
suppose you'd lived there all your life,
do you think that you would mind?

But it's not just the adults who suffer in Harlem. The most indescribable and distressing suffering I've witnessed befalls children. It cripples their minds—their whole being—for life. Not just children forced to beg like dogs to survive or to polish car windows for pennies for white drivers at stoplights. Even more, the children we slowly kill through our own negative thinking about them—the crushing thinking they internalize until they believe they have no future.

What does it do to a child to see brothers and sisters shot in the streets? When I was teaching a class in Harlem, I discovered there wasn't a single pupil who hadn't witnessed a shootout in the streets, where stray bullets were part of daily life.

They refused to believe I came from a country with no guns. "How do people defend themselves?" they asked.

And what impression does it make on a young mother to say goodbye to her four-year-old son in a world where it's hard to tell the difference between a cradle and a coffin?

1972 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY

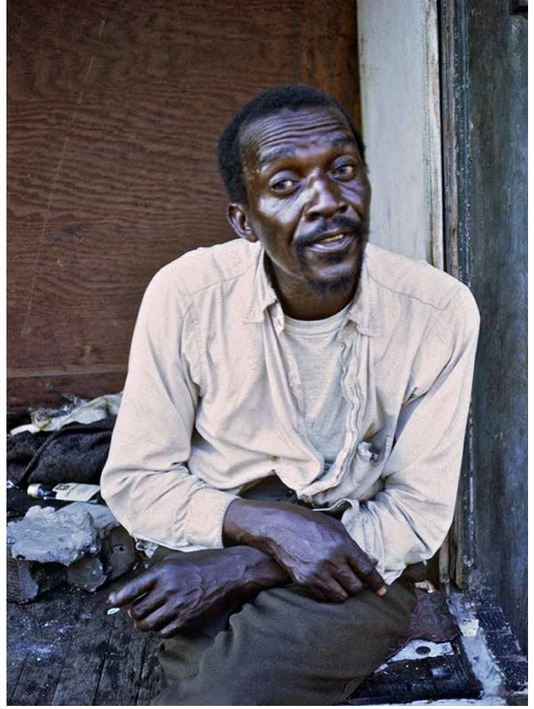
Give a damn III and this section as it is presented in my slideshow

Note: Sort baggrund her

1974 - Washington, DC

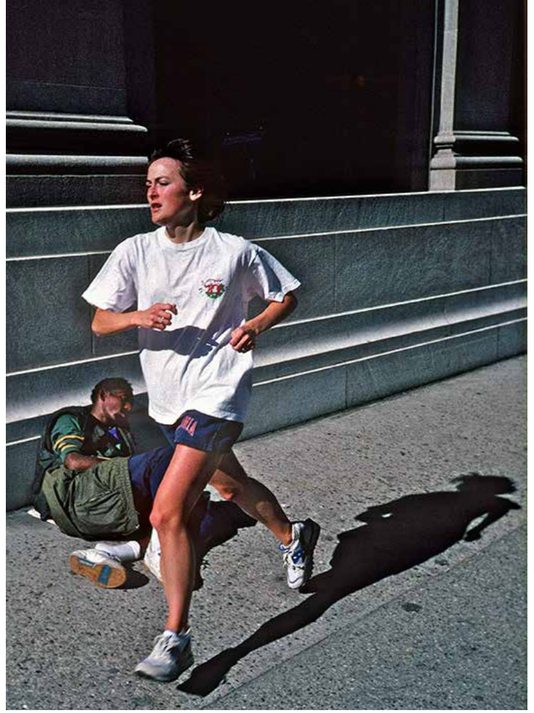
1974 - Bronx, NY

1974 - Bronx, NY

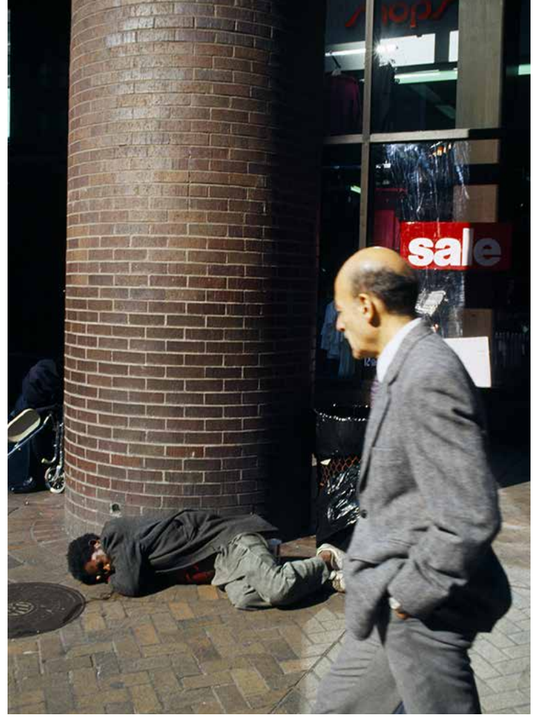


1974 - Baltimore, MD

1974 - Washington, NC



1992 - NYC



1995 - NYC

The White Gaze: Seeing Harlem Through a Lens of Despair

"A Harlemite is a man who sees the world from the bottom and still loves it." - Langston Hughes, "Harlem"

Interview with a wino: *"I think everybody was born naked, so we're all human beings. Until I find someone that was born with clothes on, I'm not going to think they're any more than me. That's the way I feel about it."*

And it might begin to reach you
Why I give a damn about my fellow man,
And it might begin to teach you
How to give a damn
about your fellow man.

This sentimental *"give a damn about your fellow man"* journey through Harlem captures, in all its saccharine sentimentality the white liberal gaze. From the paternal almost loving care of the Southern plantation aristocracy, there's a direct link to the endless talk about helping fellow man among Northern liberals.

Many liberals do great and exhausting work in the ghettos, but whether we breast-feed or bottle feed our outcasts, the result is the same: we're blaming the victims by trying to accustom them to their unjust outcast fate instead of changing ourselves.

Liberals don't see Blacks or browns as inherently inferior, as conservatives may. No, we see them as *functionally* inferior—damaged by slavery and past discrimination. After having read this book, they'll ask in despair: "What can we do?" But we lack the courage, or are paralyzed by the fear of looking into the soul to get in touch with our abyss of pain—the wound that makes us such effective, if well-meaning, oppressors.

Thus, we liberals become one of oppression's most reliable tools. We help our outcasts adapt to an oppression that renders them functionally inferior enough to satisfy our own liberal needs to administer paternalistic care to the "untermensch" (subhuman).

The Black or brown underclass, having no time for our condescension, often tries to provoke our true racist or Islamophobic face. They refuse to see as "progress" the knife in their back pulled from four inches to only two. They'd rather stab us back into our age-old "white backlash" with these words:

First of all I want to be loved...
If I can't be loved, I want to be respected
If I can't be respected,
I want to be recognized
If I can't be recognized, I want to be accepted
If I can't be accepted, I want to be noticed
If I can't be noticed, I want to be feared
If I can't be feared, I want to be hated

Blacks' view of Harlem is the opposite of the upper caste's need to see only victims. They would lose their sanity if they focused solely on the worst in the ghetto. For instance, they won't emphasize that 10% of Harlem's youth are violent criminals terrorizing the streets. They'll turn it upside down, encouraged by the fact that, despite this criminal environment, 90% have never been in conflict with the law.

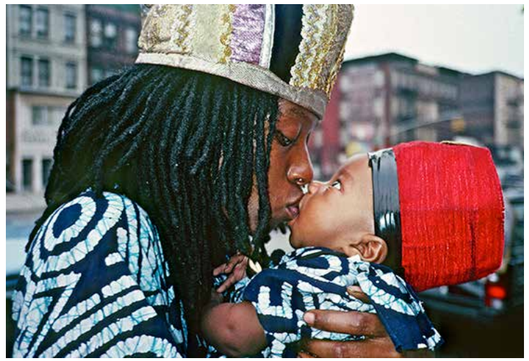
They'll look at the culture thriving amid the oppression and be heartened that most of Harlem's population are surviving. They'll see the many roses that manage to grow up in this jungle.

1974 - Harlem, NY

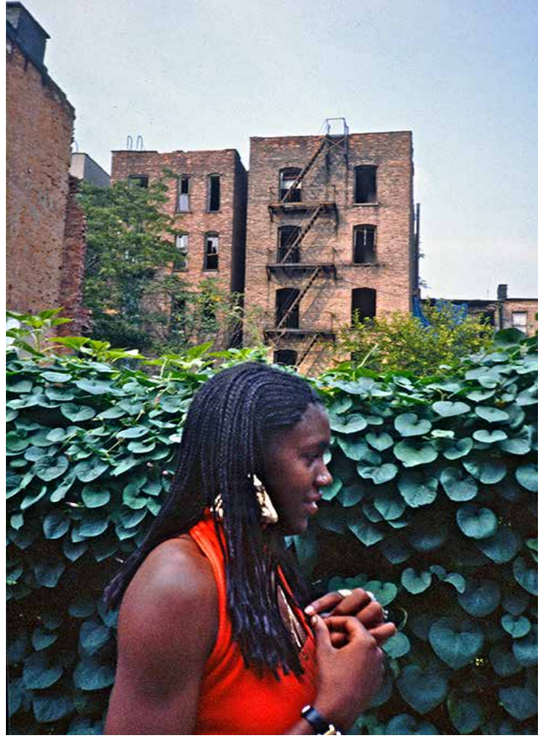
1974 - NYC

1989 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY



1992 - Harlem, NY



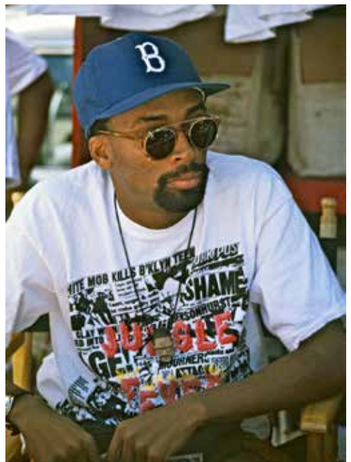
1995 - Harlem, NY

1994 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY - Right 1995 - Spike Lee

Blossoming Amid Concrete: The Harlem Rose

"Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete? Provin nature's laws wrong it learned how to walk without havin feet" – Tupac Shakur og Nikki Giovanni

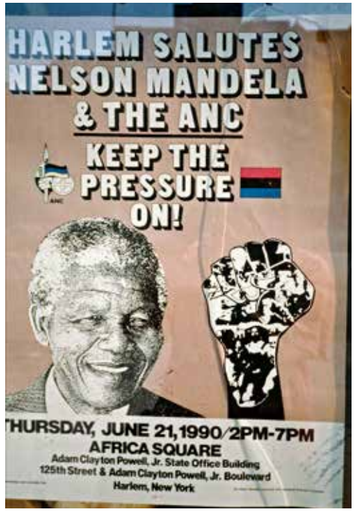


There is a rose in Spanish Harlem,
a rose in black and Spanish Harlem.
It is a special one,
it never sees the sun
it only comes out
when the moon is on the run
and all the stars are gleaming.
It's growing in the street
right up through the concrete
soft, sweet and dreaming.
With eyes as black as coal
they look down in my soul
and start a fire there
and then I lose control
I want to beg her pardon
I'm going to pick that rose
and watch her
as she grows in my garden.

There is a rose song by Aretha Franklin - illustrated with more uplifting photos from Harlem

1973 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY



1990 - Harlem, NY

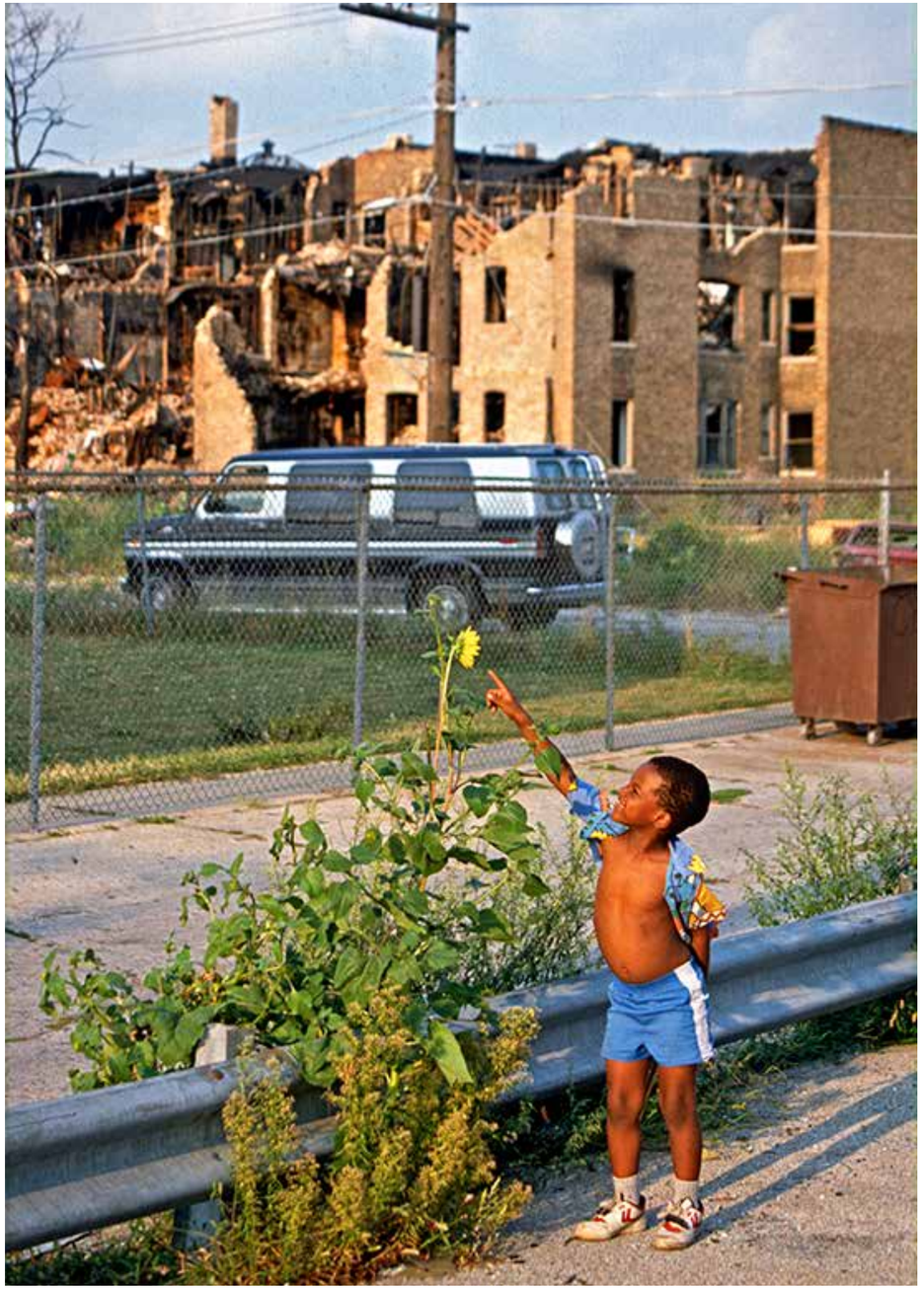
1974 - Spanish Harlem, NY

1974 - NYC

1974 - NYC

1974 - NYC

1990 - Harlem, NY



1995 - Chicago

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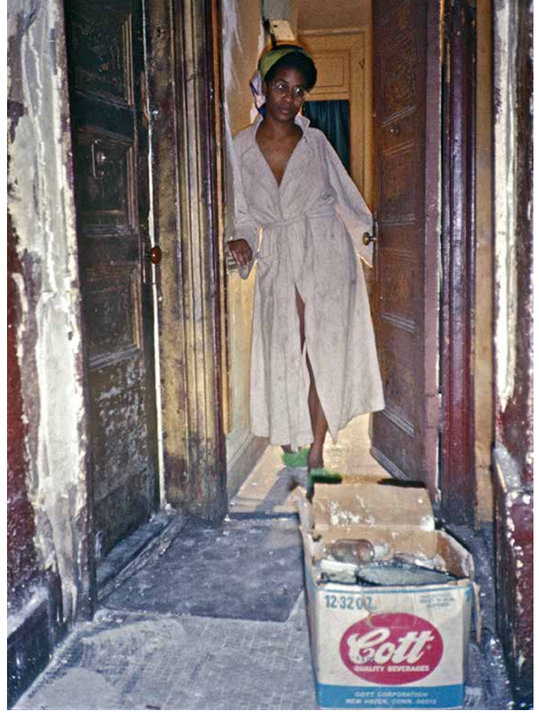
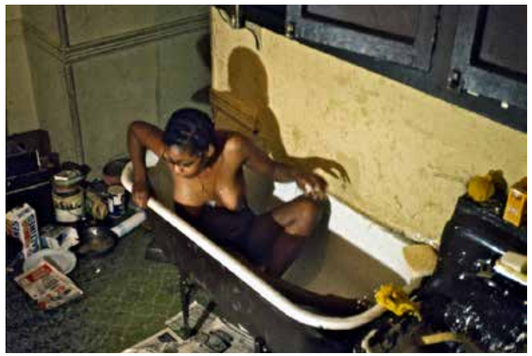




All three Merrilyn 1972 - NYC

1974 - Bronx, NY

1974 - Bronx, NY

We Love to Say It With Roses, but Use Them in the Oppression of the Group

"Racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is, more often, broad sympathy toward some and broader skepticism toward others."
— Ta-Nehisi Coates

For me, such a rose was Merrilyn. When I met her she was a heroin addict shooting up a couple of times a week. Her situation in the tiny apartment was desperate, and I admired her ability to eventually escape it—I myself only sank deeper into despair while living with her.

Never had I lived in such oppressive, soul-crushing conditions. I could neither think nor write. It wasn't just the break-ins—though they were constant—it was the fear of them, the fear of what might happen next, the fear of simply stepping into the hallway where someone might attack you with a knife or a gun.

Narrowness you can adapt to. You get used to a dinner table doubling as a bathtub, to a wire fence stretched between kitchen and bedroom so rats won't bite your face at night. You even get used to brushing dead cockroaches out of the bed each morning. And sometimes the shootings and sirens from violent TV shows blasting through the walls were a relief from the real ones outside.

But the fear—the persistent fear of being stabbed in the stomach—you never adapt to. I was attacked in that neighborhood even on Christmas Eve, by three gunmen.

How I survived living with Merrilyn you must not ask me. It's a paradox that, in the richest country in the world, the word "survival," which I'd never even heard before coming to America (except in connection with Darwin), has become an everyday concept.

But ask rather how Merrilyn survived it—not only in body but also in mind. She did: she even pulled herself out of the ghetto and became an actress in San Francisco. Since then she's often introduced my slideshow to my audiences.
Yes, she was a rose who managed to spring up through the asphalt.

My conversation about this story with Merrilyn 43 years later filmed by TV in Copenhagen

The Invisible Walls of Ghettoization and Oppression

"The ghetto is not where you live. The ghetto is not where you work. The ghetto is not who you are. The ghetto is a state of mind."
— Sister Souljah, The Coldest Winter Ever

And all over the world, we oppressors love to use such exceptional roses to oppress our victims further.
We constantly assure each other—with rosy stories of individuals or a black middleclass or an Obama having made it—that we're not only fair but virtually saints.
It is a mean-spirited and calculated effort to show that there's something wrong with all those not making it, again blaming our captives for their own captivity.

Most oppressors struggle to grasp how we build ghettos There are, for instance, no walls around a ghetto, and it isn't simply about bad housing.

That it is not only the underclass we ghettoize I saw with Merrilyn's sister LaVerne who did just as well. For fear of living with a white person, she had moved out while I lived in their apartment. But the ghetto moved with her and in 2004 she found her boyfriend of 25 years murdered – stuffed in a plastic bag under their bed – just 5 years after their 17-year-old son was murdered for unexplained reasons.
With their interest in Shakespeare, in 2015 they traveled together to England and to visit me in Copenhagen.

As bad as Harlem was, it wasn't the worst New York ghetto of the 1970s. In the South Bronx, where European film crews often shot their footage on the wartime destruction of Germany, there were districts where nine out of ten people died an unnatural death—murder, hunger, overdose, rat bites, etc. In the Brownsville ghetto, I saw two murders and heard of four others the same day.
That the ghetto is not anything concrete, like the broken bottles and litter, I saw in Detroit, where housing was far better than in Harlem. Here I was fortunate to get to live on both sides of the invisible line dividing the ghetto and the white areas – all the way out there where every white house is up for sale.

1974 - Saratoga, NY

White Flight: How We Continually Build and Expand Ghettos

"The only thing extraordinary about white flight is that it is called 'flight.' As if it was not strategic white avoidance of blackness." – Ibram X. Kendi

I can understand many forms of white racism, but I still cannot fathom why whites abandon everything they've built the moment a Black family moves in. These middle-class Black homeowners maintain their lawns, hedges, rhododendrons—exactly the way whites demand. And this is what the neighborhood would continue to look like if whites didn't flee. And their culture is far more American than that of European or Asian immigrants we immediately welcome into our so-called melting pot.

Living on the white side of the for-sale-sign "ghetto fence," I rarely heard any reason for leaving besides the vague claim of "declining property values"—a decline caused only because whites sell at once through block-busting.

Thus, I experienced it as one great white American conspiracy to prevent blacks from gaining access to the melting pot, masterminded by illegal redlining through the National Association of Realtors. One reason I myself often had to flee to the cooler suburbs was the stifling summer temperatures in the red- or rather heat-lined ghettos, with much concrete and asphalt—up to 20 degrees hotter as the NY Times has proven than the tree-covered white neighborhoods.

Every time I left, I felt I'd betrayed the black underclass. For when we flee to what become attractive neighborhoods, our property values rise, letting us borrow against rising equity to send our kids to elite universities to get further ahead.
But this is stolen wealth, since our flight collapses Black home values, blocking their ability to borrow and invest, thus making them poorer and poorer.

Through this aversive racism, every white in the '70s had made themselves six times richer than every black. By 2000, eight times richer. After the Bush tax cuts, twelve times. And today—after the financial crisis triggered partly by predatory "subprime loans" pushed on struggling Black families—we've made ourselves nearly twenty times as rich.

Stolen Wealth and the Widening Black and White Gab

"White flight is a form of racism that is more subtle and less acknowledged than more overt forms of discrimination. It is a way of maintaining racial segregation without having to explicitly endorse it." - Jesmyn Ward

On the other side of the fence, I experienced every white who moved as a stab in the heart of the blacks. The older blacks would do everything to please the whites, but the young ones were far more sensitive. The sudden feeling of being shut out of society's mainstream—seeing someone pull up the ladder to the "American Dream" at the very moment you're closest to it—naturally triggers resentment. Sometimes violent. Our stab in their hearts could turn a few otherwise well-behaved youths into mischief-makers, provoking the remaining whites on the ghetto fringe, who then blame the victim and move.

I'm not dealing much in this book with middle-class problems, but I couldn't avoid seeing the link between the violence we commit against the dignity of people on the borders of the ghetto and the violence I later saw in the inner ghettos. Between our white all-American stab at the black middle class and the frightening backstabbing in the underclass.

I saw the explosion of black crime in the '70s as the irrational anger caused by our betrayal. I didn't understand why it declined in the '90s—until I grasped how white flight and local governments deliberately destroyed thriving black neighborhoods by driving highways through them, isolating them even after segregation officially ended.

When oil companies added lead to gasoline in the 1940s, it impaired children's brain development—causing aggression and reduced impulse control in their teenage years. This hit hardest the black children we'd forced into inner-city districts next to highways and refineries, as in Philadelphia and Houston's Fourth Ward, where George Floyd grew up. Houses whites left behind were full of poisonous lead. I often saw children looking disturbingly "dull"—brain-damaged—or gnawing on lead pipes. It was that generation that acted out with "dumb" violent crime. When leaded gasoline began to be phased out in the '70s, newborns were exposed to less lead—hence crime plummeted twenty years later.

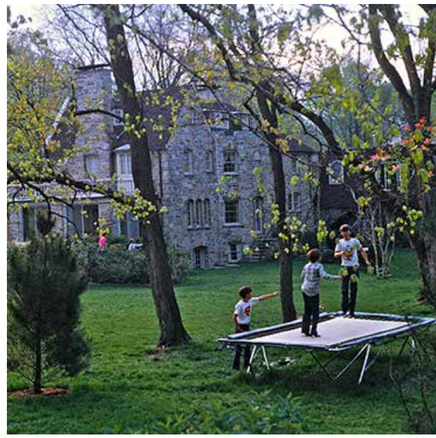
I came to understand the ghetto as a white, socially enforced continuation of slavery's violent milieu. When this internalized psychic violence is intensified by unemployment—especially in Detroit—it explodes outward. Just as black divorce rates rise with unemployment, so do murder and family violence. Almost every time I came back to Detroit, more of my black friends had been killed.

The following letter to my parents, written during my first months in America, shows how I immediately sensed the Golgotha-stab of white racism behind the bleeding of a people on the cross.

Recording with Detroit friend about all the friends killed since my last visit

1991 - Freeman's quarter, Houston, TX

1986 - Philadelphia, PA. Project next to the freeway and ESSO oil refinery



1971 - Alexandria, VA

Easter in Detroit

St. John 20, 24-25

"Dehumanization and Stigma...a Scapegoat to Bear the Sins of the World" - Isabel Wilkerson: "Caste – The Origins of Our Discontents"

Dear Mom and Dad,
This is the most shocking Easter I have ever experienced. I am now in Detroit, which is nothing less than a nightmare. On the way from San Francisco, I stopped in Chicago to visit Denia, the young Black writer I lived with at Christmas. Even there the horrors began. You remember the two girlfriends we spent so much time with? She told me that one of them, Theresia—that tender, quiet 19-year-old girl—has since been murdered. She was probably killed by someone she knew, since it seems she opened the door to them. Found by her fiancé, shot and cut up with knives.

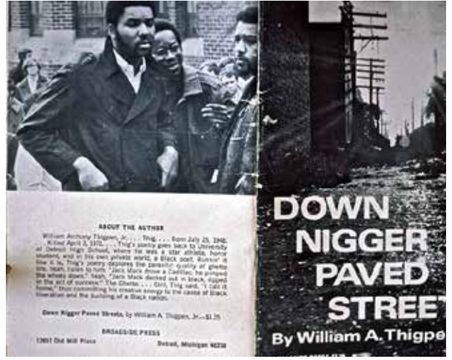
She is the second person I have known in America who has been murdered. Denia has now bought a gun and started target-practicing. That night in Chicago I also experienced my first big shootout, probably between police and criminals. We were on Mohawk Street when it suddenly broke out; I tried to look out, but Denia pulled me away.

But compared with here in Detroit, I've almost forgotten all that. First, I lived with a well-off auto worker's family in the respectable Black neighborhoods at the seven-mile limit, out there where white areas begin. Their son Dwight Vann had picked me up and invited me home—the third Black home I've lived in. Beautiful people (note: Dwight was killed the following year).

Easter morning they took me to church. Then I moved into the ghetto itself with three students, and since then it has been a nightmare. One of the first days, Thigpen, whom I had just met, was murdered.
He was a fantastic person, big as a bear, and a poet (I am sending you his collection, DOWN NIGGER PAVED STREETS).
For having written a harmless poem about the narcotics trade, he was apparently executed by gangsters along with two friends. They were tied up on the floor and shot in the back of the head.

What shocked me most was the reaction of the three people I live with. One of them, Jeff, had known Thigpen for years and is photographed with him on the book. He came in calmly with the newspaper saying, "Hey, you remember this dude, Thigpen, you met? Look, they blew him away too." It made no greater impression. This is how they react to all the violence, which is really getting to me. Still, they are afraid themselves. I'm not the only one trembling here.

The nights are the worst. I'm getting really down from lack of sleep. Jeff and the others sleep upstairs; I stay in the living room. Every night they shove the refrigerator in front of the door and put empty bottles on top so any attempt to open it will make them fall. One night the cat leaped up and knocked them over, and I shot upstairs to the others. I'm a nervous wreck and constantly lie listening for footsteps outside (nobody but robbers walks at night in Detroit as far I can tell).



1971 - Detroit

Once in a while I hear shots. I never really trembled before, but now I sometimes get the same jelly-like sensation as when I was mugged in San Francisco. My heartbeat alone keeps me awake.
I really didn't think I'd slept once the entire week, until I suddenly woke from a terrible nightmare. I rarely dream when traveling, but that night I dreamed about a sunny day when I was eleven, lying on the floor at home in the parsonage eating oranges as the radio news announced the murder of Lumumba. I now saw this scene clearly in the nightmare, but it kept changing to Africa, where I was lying on the ground while Africans fired machine-gun bursts at me. I shouted to them to stop, but the bullets just kept on drilling into me, a terrible sensation. I woke to the real Detroit nightmare, which suddenly seemed peaceful in comparison, and finally managed a couple hours of sleep.

But the nightmares aren't always over with daylight. One of the first days I ventured out on foot. After half an hour, a police car with two white cops stopped and called me over. I was almost happy to see white faces again. They asked for my ID. You are constantly being stopped like this when you walk around in the ghetto.

1996 - Detroit

I often ask myself what difference there really is between being in the ghetto here and being a black in apartheid South Africa, when you must constantly show your identity papers to white policemen. Almost automatically I put my hand in my bag for my passport. Immediately their pistols jumped out into my face: "Hold it!" It is terrible to look into the muzzle of a gun, and I began trembling from fear. But nothing happened; they had just feared I had a pistol. It felt like a miracle their guns didn't go off.
How can people live in such a world where they have so little trust in each other?
They gave me the usual warning: "You better get yourself out of this neighborhood quick!" I had regained my confidence and replied audaciously, "I live here!" The longer I live here, the more I look at whites with the eyes of Blacks, and I can't help harboring an ever-increasing hatred of them.

It is strange to live in a city like Detroit where you never see anything but Black faces. Little by little you undergo a slow change. The Black faces become become close and familiar, and therefore warm, while the white faces seem distant and unknown and therefore cold. In spite of all the horrors, I feel no desire to go out into the cold icy wastes where the ghetto stops. So you can understand the shock I get each time I turn on the TV and see only white faces. In a strange way they become part of the Detroit nightmare.

For it's not only the crime that keeps me awake. It's just as much the television and radio. In the ghettos of Detroit and Chicago it's a habit to leave the TV and radio on all night to make robbers think you're awake. Many Blacks can't fall asleep without the noise. I discovered this when Denia and I wanted a nap in Chicago and she automatically turned on the TV. It is shocking how early some become addicted to this noise-narcotic.

When I lived with Orline, this beautiful young Black mother in Jackson outside Detroit, I found it almost impossible for us to live together. When we went to bed she always turned on the radio. I waited for her to fall asleep, then tried to lower the volume for myself to fall asleep—but every time I got the volume down to a certain level, her two small children woke up crying. I could only take it two nights after which I moved. We were simply, as Orline said, "culturally incompatible."

1973 - Jackson, MI - Orline and children

1974 - Detroit

1971 - Chris, Aaron and Jerry in Detroit

But I think there are terrifying implications if so many Blacks in the urban ghettos are dependent on this noise. You cannot imagine in Denmark how primitive American radio is: the constant boom-boom music interrupted every other minute by what they call "messages." All the time you hear the soporific, "Leave the driving to us." It feels like one big white conspiracy against the Blacks.

Just as they bombed the South Vietnamese into "strategic villages" to brainwash them, so it seems as if Blacks here have been forced into big psychic concentration camps where they can be better controlled by mass media. It is incredible how, under this oppression, they conform almost exactly to the views of their oppressors.

In the South you could at least think, but here you are constantly bombarded with what others want you to think—or prevented from thinking at all. Doesn't all this noise stifle a person's capacity for independent development? Is it strange many seem like zombies, as they themselves jokingly say?

The three I live with are among the few politically active people in Detroit. Jeff has given me books about Cuba. But it is impossible to read in these surroundings, with all the noise, nervousness, trembling, and fear of something—though you don't even know what.

Jeff is one of the many Blacks who have traveled illegally to Cuba through Canada. He tells me so many fantastic things about it, but much of it seems irrelevant in these cruel surroundings. He says Cuba is the first place he has been able to breathe freely. All the Cubans are armed, just as here in Detroit, but nevertheless he was never afraid in Cuba. The only disappointment was that Cuban Blacks don't have Afro hairstyles.

Jeff was so happy in Cuba that he tried everything to avoid being sent back, but he wasn't allowed to stay. Now, after the trip, the FBI has visited his parents twice; his student aid was cut off and he was expelled from college. He has become a taxi driver while in his own dream world reading books about Cuba in his cab. He told me laughing that he "held himself up" a few weeks ago—stole $50 from himself and called the police, and said the robber was Black, and ran in that direction —so he wouldn't have to work and could drive to Belle Isle to read about Cuba.

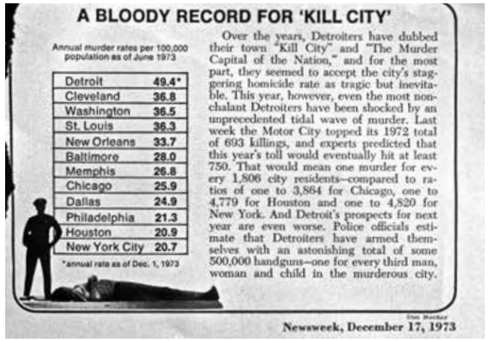
Unfortunately, he does not want to work politically; the system is too massive, he says. So now he works only to get back to Cuba. But he wants to go to Washington in two days to demonstrate against the Vietnam War. We will drive together. I can hardly wait to get out of this hell, and hope Washington is more peaceful so I can rest.

But I have to come back to Detroit. As in Chicago, I have met such warm people here that I cannot fathom their goodness. How can two such cruel and oppressive cities contain such exceptional people?

It has to be possible to learn to live with the ghetto, for I must come back to these people. But it will take a long time to get used to it. Just a trip to the corner store in the evening requires taking the car. Jeff and the others simply do not dare walk one and a half blocks.

I will remember Detroit as an endless glide through a ghost town to the car radio's newest Black hit, "For god's sake, give more power to the people," pounded into my head. And every day the new murder statistics. Since it's Easter week, only 26 were murdered. They expect to reach 1,000 before Christmas.

1972 - Detroit



A BLOODY RECORD FOR 'KILL CITY'

Annual murder rates per 100,000 population as of June 1973

Detroit	49.4*
Cleveland	36.8
Washington	36.5
St. Louis	36.3
New Orleans	33.7
Baltimore	28.0
Memphis	26.8
Chicago	25.9
Dallas	24.9
Philadelphia	21.3
Houston	20.9
New York City	20.7

*annual rate as of Dec. 1, 1973

Over the years, Detroiters have dubbed their town "Kill City" and "The Murder Capital of the Nation," and for the most part, they seemed to accept the city's staggering homicide rate as tragic but inevitable. This year, however, even the most nonchalant Detroiters have been shocked by an unprecedented tidal wave of murder. Last week the Motor City topped its 1972 total of 693 killings, and experts predicted that this year's toll would eventually hit at least 750. That would mean one murder for every 1,500 city residents—compared to ratios of one to 3,864 for Chicago, one to 4,779 for Houston and one to 4,820 for New York. And Detroit's prospects for next year are even worse. Police officials estimate that Detroiters have armed themselves with an astonishing total of some 500,000 handguns—one for every third man, woman and child in the murderous city.

Newsweek, December 17, 1973

1971 - Philadelphia, PA

More lives are lost here in a year than in six years in Northern Ireland. Yet in the newspapers, "five people killed in yesterday's violence in Detroit" merits only a notice on page 18, while the front-page headlines decry the loss of two lives in Northern Ireland's "tragic" civil war.
By the way, did the Danish papers write about the stigmatized Black girl who was bleeding during Easter?

Anyway, I hope you had a more peaceful Easter.
With love,
Jacob.

The Paradox of the Ghetto: External Origins

"A lot of people have a misconception of what the ghetto is all about. You know, it's only a small percentage of the people that are bad. Everybody else is good." – Ice Cube

American ghettos stretch in thick belts around downtown business districts—five to ten miles wide—as here in Houston, where the rich live in the center and the poor in slums on the outskirts. The underclass is constantly pushed around. "Urban renewal" (or "negro removal," as Baldwin said), supposedly for their benefit, is used to dispose of, concentrate, or hide our undesirables.

This has been especially true in historic Harlem, from which most of my Black friends have now been forced out. It often made me cry to see whole European-looking "slum" neighborhoods plowed under and stacked vertically, as in Baltimore's once-charming ghetto.

Stacked up, people feel even more confined, and crime rises with the height of these vertical slums. In Philadelphia, street gangs were replaced by floor gangs struggling floor against floor —so dangerous that stepping off an elevator on the wrong floor could mean death. More than a hundred 12- to 17-year-olds were killed each year.

One was a street vendor who made a living selling my book American Pictures. I had several friends who were held up at gunpoint by ten- or eleven-year-olds who also shoot wildly around with Uzi submachine guns.

By sentencing such children to terms twice their age, we whites imagine we have "removed" part of the ghetto. In the same futile way, we demolish the houses without removing the causes of the ghetto.

Though five out of six housing-code violations stem from landlord neglect—not despairing tenant behavior— the blame-the-poor myth that "people cause slums" persists.

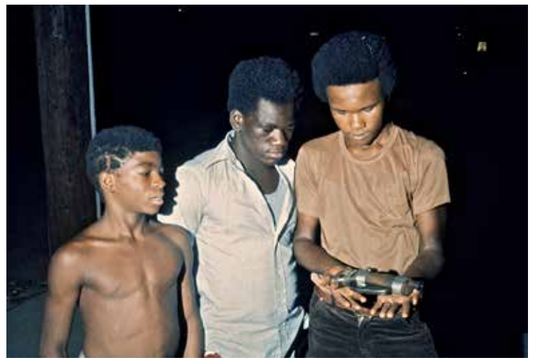
Yet living in those dilapidated apartments handed to the poor only after they were worn out and used up, I never saw tenant destruction of the type that creates a slum: leaking roofs, sagging floors, defective plumbing, sewer pipes, or wiring. What I did see were years of slumlord refusal to repair any of it.

I will never forget the anguish in the Fillmore ghetto when my friends Johari and Lance lost their daughter after she fell through a rotten window their slumlord had refused to bring up to code. Her funeral appears at the end of this book.

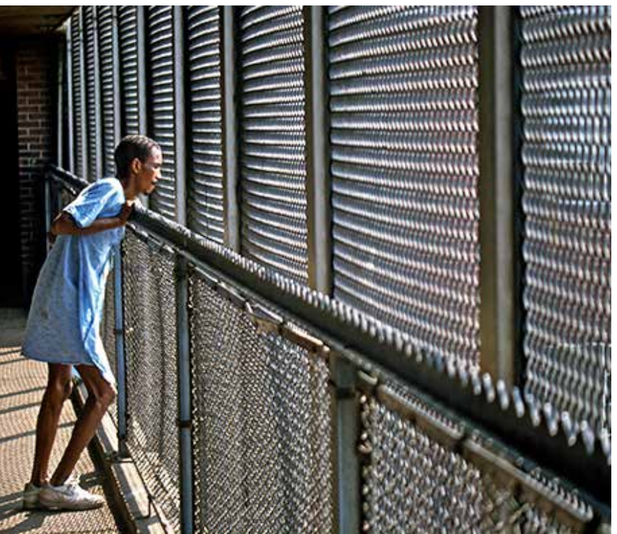
1973 - Baltimore

1973 - Baltimore

1974 - Philadelphia, PA



1975 - Richmond, VA



1997 - Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago

1997 - Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago

1973 - Lake Forest, IL

Washington as a Mirror of Our Worldwide Ghetto Problem

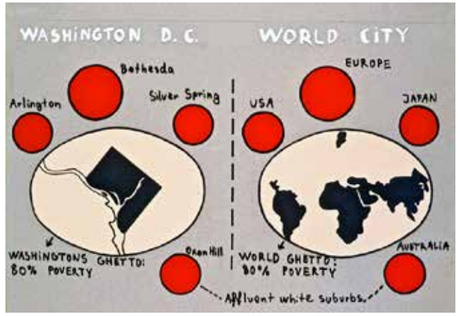
"In many ways, Washington, D.C., is a Third World country within a First World nation." - Alice Walker

It's a paradox that we always search for the cause of the ghetto inside the ghetto, even though the very word "ghetto" implies its causes lie outside—especially in the affluent white suburbs surrounding every city. Here we enjoy trees, pools, and well-funded schools. We choose to live outside city limits so our children avoid "undesirable" classmates and so we can avoid paying the taxes that support the very cities that employ us. In this way cities grow poorer. Some whites now call such places "underserved communities" so as not to stigmatize the inhabitants, not realizing they are stigmatizing themselves—those who continually underserve the ghettos they created.

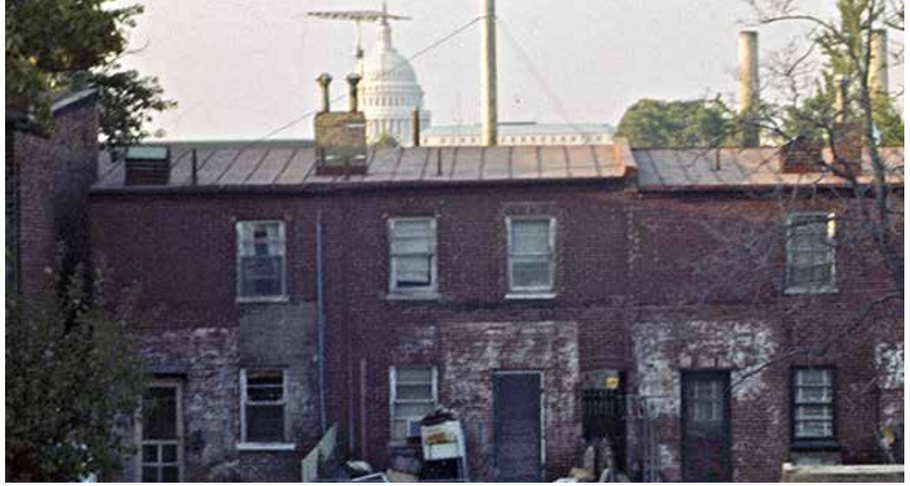
Washington, D.C. embodied this dynamic when I first visited in the 1970s: 80 percent of the city was poor neighborhoods of color, treated almost like a famine zone. As in the global ghetto, our wealthy suburbs in Europe, the U.S., Japan, China, and Australia own most businesses in poor districts and extract profit while refusing to contribute "taxes" back. Although more capital flows from poor countries than to them—thanks to unequal trade rules—we still congratulate ourselves on our generosity and are baffled by growing anger toward the West.

During my years as a lecturer, Washington, D.C.—capital of the richest nation on earth—became a war zone with street shootouts rivaling those in parts of the Third World. I often couldn't give evening lectures because students feared going home, or because my equipment had been stolen.

The crime we fear from poor countries—especially terrorism—had long become routine in D.C., which had more than 2,000 percent more armed robberies per year than comparable European cities. And its murder rate was 50 percent higher than that of the entire UK, as I noted in the 1984 edition of this book. Today, as Europe's own outcasts come of age, Swedish ghettos reflect a similar murder rate.

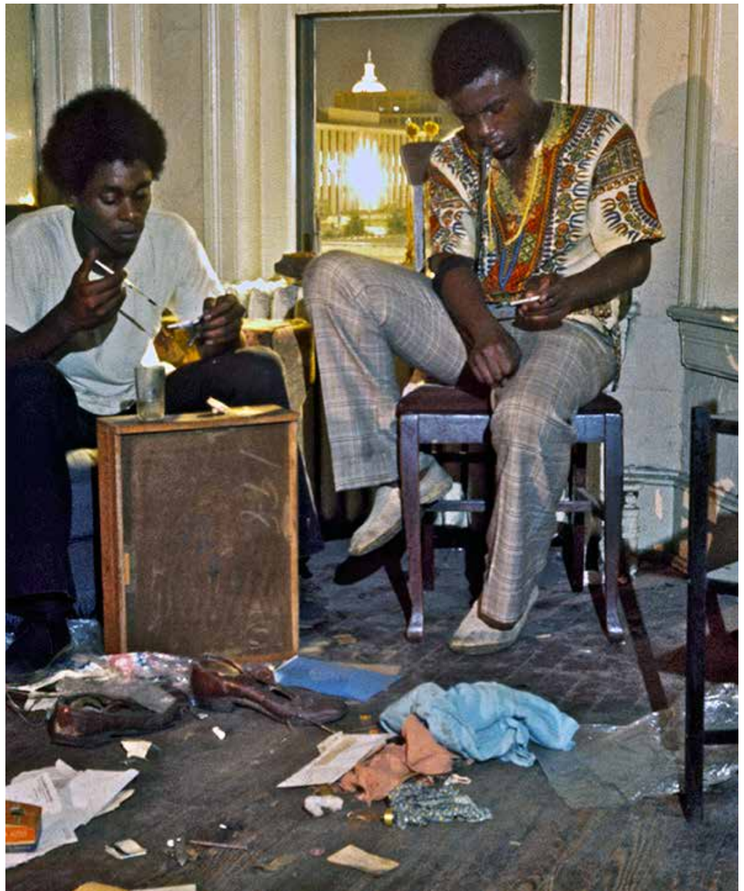


1973 - Washington DC



1973 - Washington DC

Below 1971 - Alexandria, VA and 1973 - Washington DC



"Don't you know that it's true / That for me and for you / The world is a ghetto" – WAR

One out of ten residents in Black neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. was a drug addict, according to The Washington Post. These two addicts—who first attacked me and later invited me home—lived only three blocks from the Capitol, whose white dome you can see in the background. Although members of Congress fear walking home after work, they keep increasing funding for weapons at home and abroad against those marked by our caste lottery, while cutting social programs that might have saved them. Of what use is a bullet-proof vest when death comes from the heart? A month before I stayed with these addicts, a cop was shot in their hallway, and a woman was murdered in this very room—the last glimpse she had of America's "stronghold of democracy and freedom."

1974- Elizabethtown, NC

1975 - “Thought for Food” San Francisco

1972- NYC

The Psychology of Powerlessness in Ghetto

1973 - “Smile” in Washington, DC

1973 - Baltimore

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.” – Alice Walker

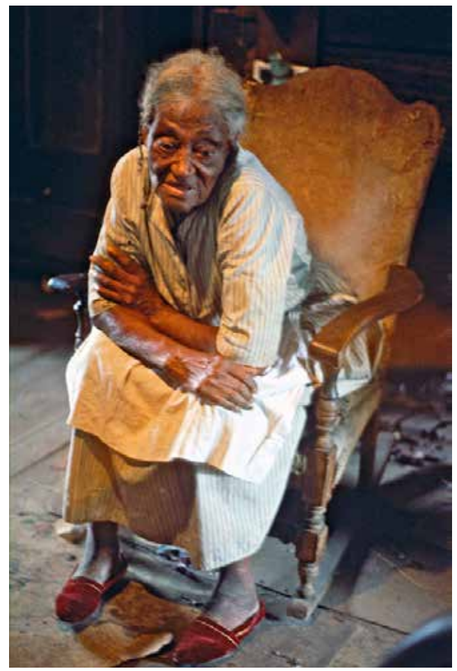
Each time we press a group into a ghetto—by our choices, our comforts, or our indifference—we wound them, and that wound soon circles back to wound us.

By comparing the Black ghetto to another—the “gray” ghetto of the elderly—I saw why those we marginalize find it almost impossible to escape. There are no visible walls around the gray ghetto either, yet dependence on crumbs from the table of the rich “imprisons” older people in a psychology of powerlessness similar to slavery. Many cannot find meaningful, well-paid work and live in permanent economic vulnerability. Feeling powerless and dependent on a system that treats them as a burden, is part of the psychopathology of the ghetto, which creates authority figures in their minds much like “The Man” in Black psychology.

Poverty pushes Black, immigrant, and elderly populations into the same neglected neighborhoods, where all are forgotten by our throwaway society. Some older people starve in their homes because they’re too afraid to go out for food. I found this old woman with the “smile” sign in her window living closest to Congress, which in the ’70s sentenced her and thousands of others to a pension 40 percent below the poverty line.

Today (2025), even more elderly people live in “deep poverty.” For anyone used to European welfare states with care workers visiting homes to cook, clean, and shop for the elderly or infirm, you find the neglect of the elderly in the US even more inexcusable.

1974 - Greenville, NC

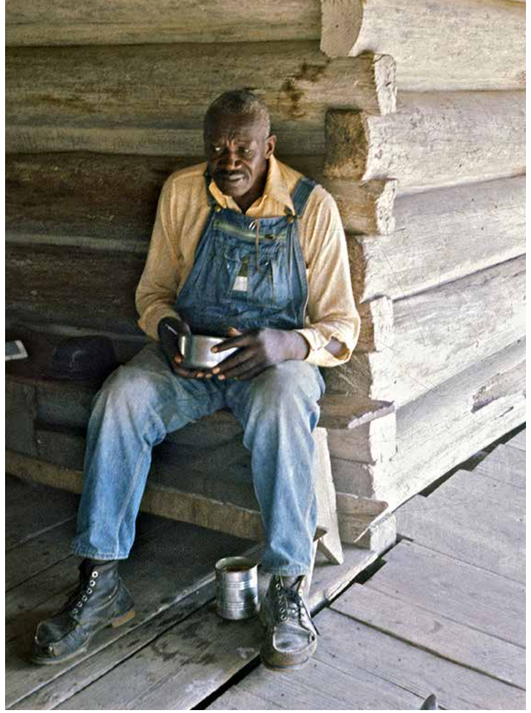


1978 - Waynesboro, GA

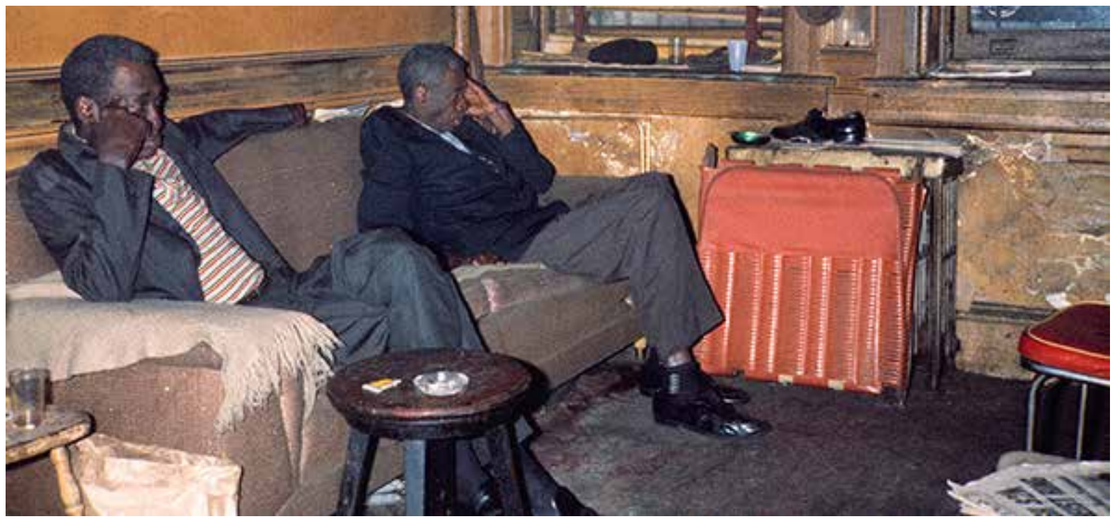
1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Norfolk, VA

1972 - NYC



1975 - Notasulga, AL



1973 - Harlem, NY

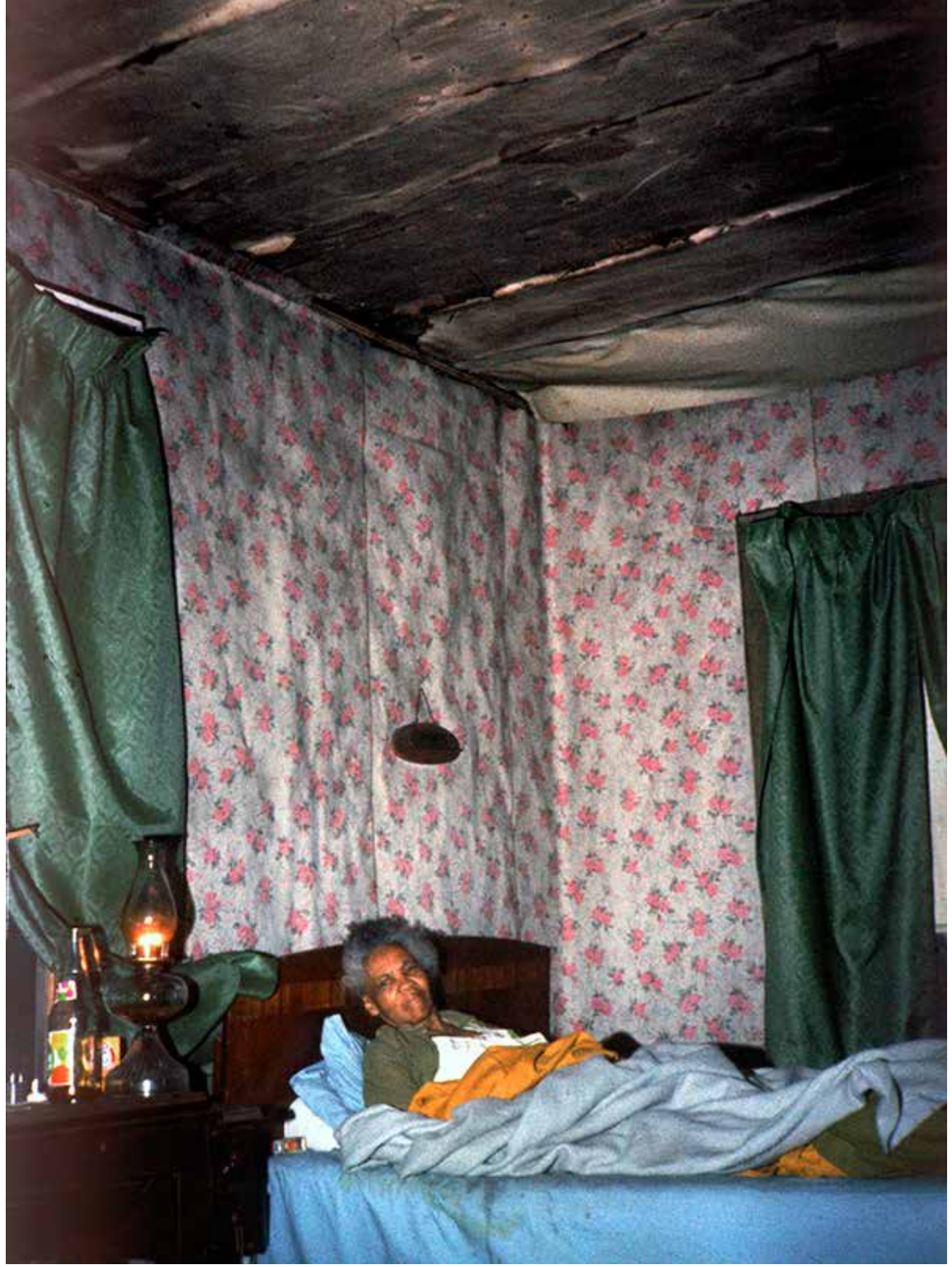
Bonds Forged in Oppression: The Black-Jewish Alliance

"The historical connections between African Americans and Jewish Americans are profound. Our joint struggles against oppression have defined significant moments in American history." – Angela Davis.

This old Jewish woman, who became one of my closest friends in New York, had emigrated from Russia before the revolution. She hoped to return one day to live out her last years in "freedom from hunger and freedom from fear," as she put it in 1972. Now she was starving, rarely had meat, and had often been mugged. Yet she held a deep love for the Black people in the neighborhood. Remembering her own ghettoization and persecution in Russia, she—like many American Jews—felt a profound commitment to the Black struggle, and it pained her to see them suffer as she did.

A majority of whites killed during the civil rights movement were Jewish. Likewise, most of my lectures in the U.S. today are organized by this minority, whose bitterly earned understanding of oppression has sharpened their solidarity. Their history has taught them to pay attention to the accumulation of pain and anger in society—forces that those in power have so often manipulated and turned against the Jews. In both Black American and brown Danish ghettos, I've also seen this bitterness take the form of sporadic anti-Semitism among people who likewise do not feel loved or respected by society.

1974 - Allendale County, SC



1974 - Tarboro, NC

1975 - Bullock County, AL

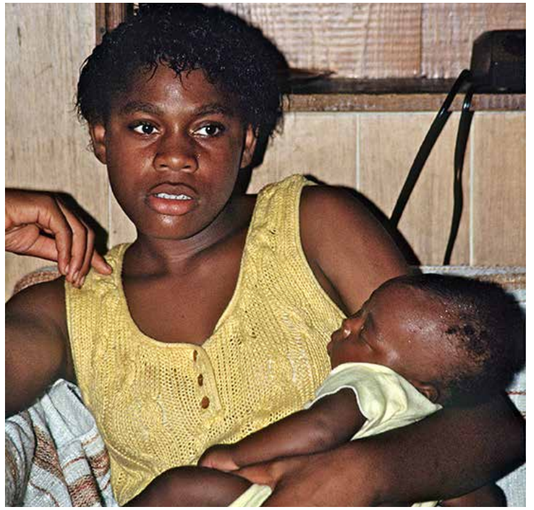
1975 - Waynesboro, GA

1975 - Notasulga, AL

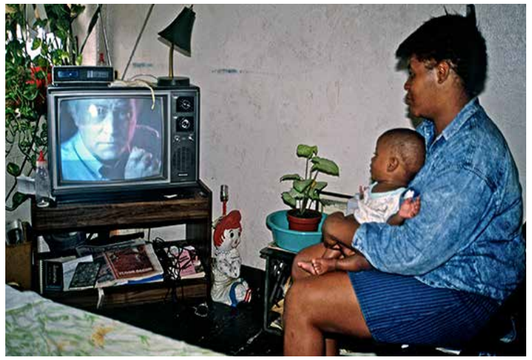
Måske sort baggrund

1975 - Oakland, CA. Black Panther with Huey Newton photo

1972 - Detroit



1992 - Burke County, GA



1990 - Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago

Our deliberate exclusion of mothers on welfare

1978 - Augusta, GA

"In the context of the 'welfare queen,' the term 'project' becomes a loaded word, signifying not only a physical space but a societal project of degradation and neglect." – Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Race for Profit"

Americans accept some social security in old age, but refuse to build a true safety net like those in European welfare states. While such systems claim to respect human dignity, I saw how America's "throwaway society" deliberately erodes it through a web of surveillance workers invading the privacy of those receiving what Americans ironically call "welfare."

Though some programs have changed since the '80s, the systematic devaluation of poor people continues through digital monitoring that polices recipients' private lives and deepens their humiliation.

The legacy of slavery—where families were torn apart—lives on in policies that expect fathers to leave home for mothers to qualify for aid.

Clinton's reforms in the 1990s promised to "end welfare as we know it," yet only made the system more restrictive, pushing more families into poverty.
Millions of women, especially Black women, remain trapped in this vicious cycle, with welfare rarely sufficient to ensure security for their neglected children. Many now rely on part-time, low-wage jobs that require expensive transportation.

The stereotype of "the Black welfare mother" is kept alive by political rhetoric about "duty to work" and "moral responsibility," language disproportionately aimed at minorities. Even though most welfare recipients are white, stereotypes about the promiscuity and laziness of black welfare mothers persist.
The cruelty toward these stigmatized mothers is fueled by politicians' hysterical talk about "welfare queens" (Reagan) and "welfare cheaters" (Trump) to distract voters from the billions these same leaders hand out to billionaires through oil subsidies, tax breaks, and corporate welfare.

The Surveillance State in a So-called Free Society

"Evil asks little of the dominant caste other than to sit back and do nothing. All that it needs from bystanders is their silent complicity in the evil committed on their behalf, though a caste system will protect, and perhaps even reward, those who deign to join in the terror." - Isabel Wilkerson, Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

The poor must navigate a maze of humiliating procedures simply to survive. In many cities, they line up from four in the morning—often in freezing rain—only to learn that no more cases will be processed.

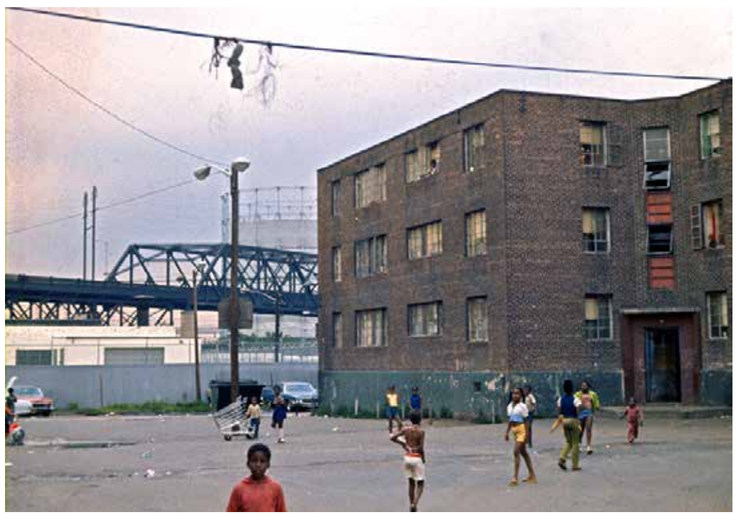
If they receive a few dollars from a boyfriend or family member, they're terrified to spend it on new kitchen equipment lest the system's spies discover signs of a man in the home and cut their support.
When I lived with such women, I witnessed every sadistic trick used to dehumanize them. I often had to hide under the bed or in a closet when investigators arrived unannounced.

Many of these women have never known a different life and are slowly broken by the constant isolation at home, enslaved by mind-numbing TV programs.
Americans may not realize how cruel they are to these people, but it parallels how refugees and immigrants are treated in Denmark, where assistance is set below subsistence level.

After 1996, Congress replaced "welfare" (AFDC) with TANF which meant strict work rules, rigid time limits, and inadequate support that never matched exploding housing and transportation costs, while globalization reduced opportunities for unskilled work.
Poor families now share $16.5 billion annually—often barely $1,800 per year—while agricultural subsidies haven grown to over $30 billion. These policies further cemented poverty. When I first arrived in the '70s, during America's period of greatest equality, the top 1 percent owned 10 percent of the nation's wealth. By 2021 that share had grown to 32 percent.

1974 - Greensboro, NC

1973 - Greensboro, NC - "The beauty and the beast" I always called this photo of Baggie and Nixon during his Watergate scandal

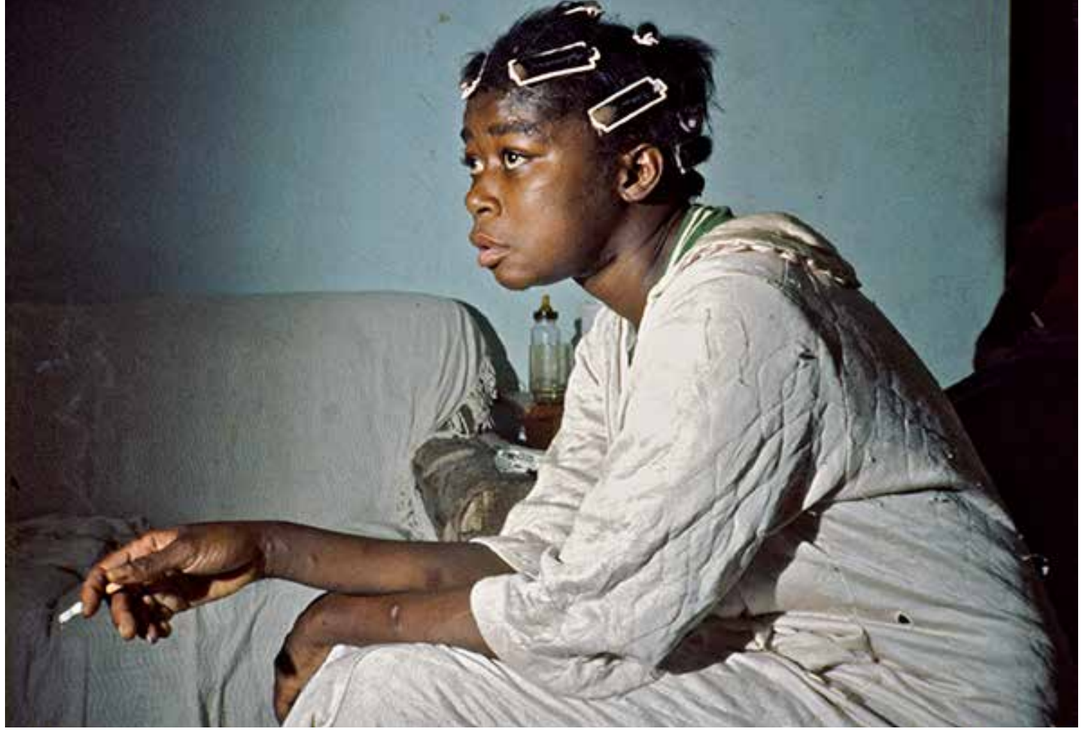


1974 - Jersey City, NJ

Poorhouses for OUR .....

"The 'projects' were not just buildings full of people, but a symbol of how the country felt about us and what it felt we deserved." – Jesmyn Ward, author of "Salvage the Bones"

American welfare mothers are usually put in special poorhouses—often near garbage dumps or roaring freeways—where land is cheap. Such "housing for the poor" is the official banishment of untouchables. Every city has such dehumanizing "projects," ostracizing people in a pariah culture so destructive that in the end they become useless to society. By sequestering the welfare mother, it becomes easy for the public to continue blaming the victims without ever seeing the suffering it inflicts.

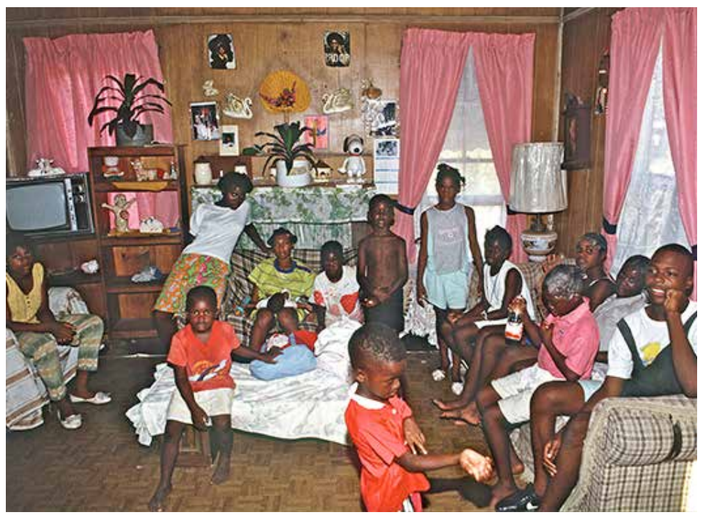


1974 - Jersey City, NJ

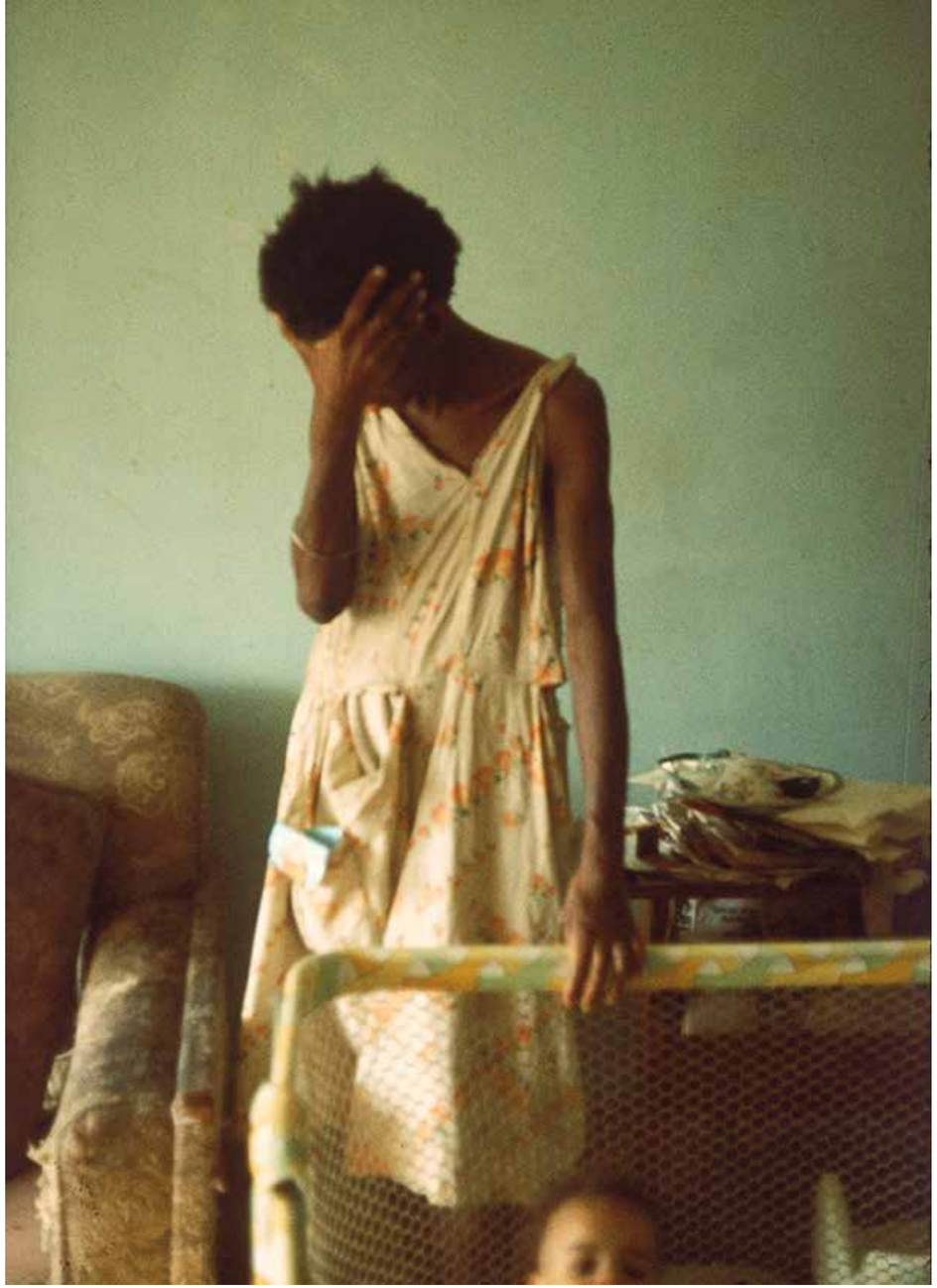
.....Untouchable Children

Children raised with a sense of being society's garbage dump are quickly nudged toward crime. When I stayed with Nell Hall [page 318], she often avoided the welfare office or even shopping because she feared walking through her own project.

The children and America are the losers, for while only 5–10% of children in Europe's welfare states grow up poor (2.9% in Denmark), 20.9% of American children are now so malignantly affected by poverty that they risk being useless in the high-tech world of the future. No nation hoping to compete in a global economy can afford to discard so much human potential.



1992 - Burke County, GA



1974 - Jersey City, NJ

1974 - Charleston, SC

1974 - Charleston, SC

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

Måske sort baggrund

1972 -Baltimore - Joann and Alfrida with the brothers

1972 - Baltimore - Claudette in her low-paid service job

Facing our Ghetto Creations: My Baltimore Mugger's Story

"I born into this city, raised in those streets. I seen the best of Baltimore, the worst of Baltimore. I seen people living their best life, I seen people lost in the struggle. I seen people turn to crime to survive, I seen people find their salvation. I've seen it all." - Tupac Shakur, Baltimore native and rapper

Those trapped in the vicious circle of dependence and underclass pathology often turn to crime to survive. So it was with my friend Alphonso in Baltimore. We met when he and his street gang tried to rob me. His wife worked in a coffee shop for barely a third of the lowest Danish wage.

In America, millions of service workers are mercilessly exploited because Congress refuses to enact a decent minimum wage. The U.S. has more menial service jobs than any other developed country.

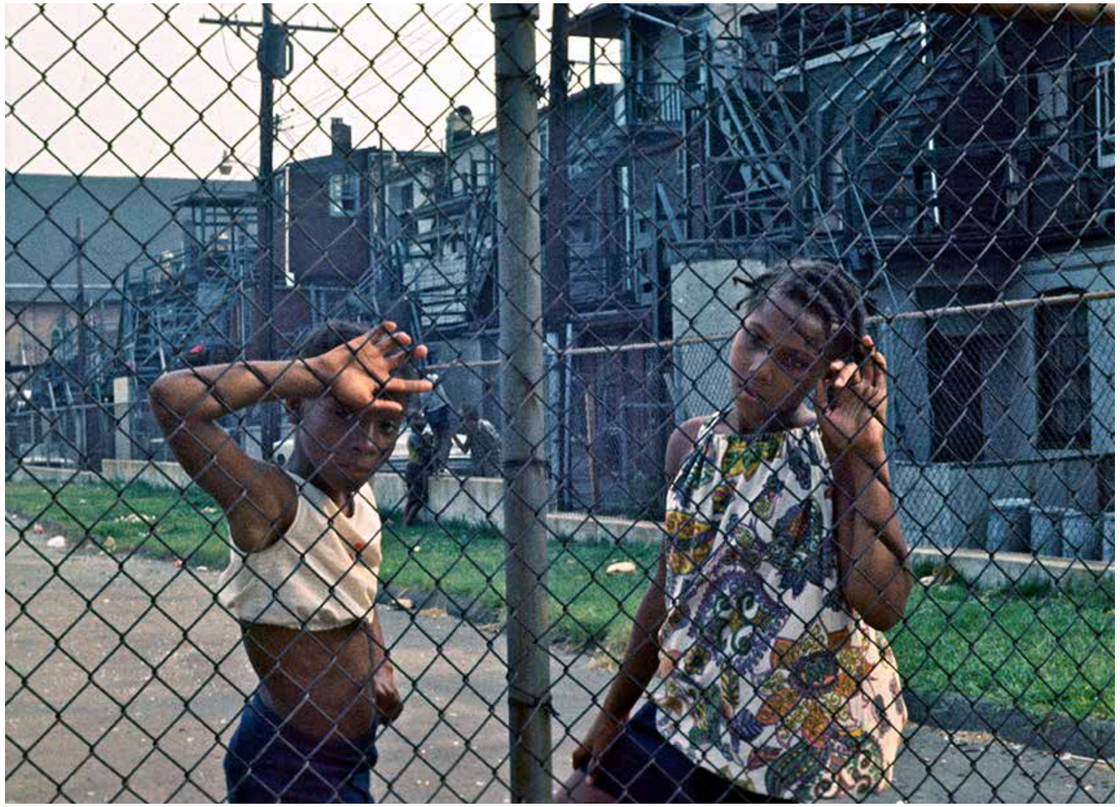
Alphonso and his wife loved each other and their six children, and it pained him that he couldn't find a job to support them. It was my first year in America, and I was shocked to learn that there was no aid available to them.

I came from a country where even new graduates were helped until they found work, so I was deeply moved that he had to rob in the street simply to keep his family afloat. I went with him to steal shoes for the children, and he introduced me to Baltimore's criminal underworld. Stealing allowed him to maintain a decent home and even rent a car once in a while for a family picnic.

When I returned a year later, his children were dejected. I learned Alphonso had been sentenced to more than six years in prison. Visiting him, I discovered his eldest son was incarcerated with him. When the family suddenly lost Alphonso's income, the son had attempted a bank robbery.

Here is Alphonso's wife visiting the prison. For six years she couldn't touch her husband and could only hear him through noisy monitored phones.

Thousands of Black marriages are dissolved this way. Modern society has institutionalized the legacy of chattel slavery by destroying the Black family and maintaining a permanent underclass—profitable to those of us who benefit from artificially low wages, but devastating to those who give up and turn to crime.



1973 Baltimore - daughters Joann and Alfrida when they tell me Alphonso has gone to jail. Today it's mostly Joann I email with after Alphonso's death in 2014.

1972 -Baltimore - Alphonso with his son Nathaniel (see him next page)

1972 -Baltimore

1973 -Baltimore - Alphonso Makell and his wife Claudette in prison

2011 - My wife and daughter in prayer with Alphonso

2003 - Reunion with Alphonso after he disappeared in prison for some years

Alphonso's Stereotypical Underclass Odyssey: Crime, Punishment, and Redemption

"I was lost in a world of drugs and violence, but I never gave up hope. I knew that there was something better out there for me. And I finally found it in God. He saved my life, and he gave me a new purpose." – Ice Cube

That most white people don't want to keep anyone in such a slave system was clear from the question they always asked when I began lecturing: "What can I do?" I was frustrated at first because I had no answer—until this book unexpectedly gave me the answer to my own white disempowerment. When it became a bestseller in Europe, American publishers rushed to acquire it, but I discovered they had no Black employees apart from low-paid service staff. I refused to reinforce such institutional racism with my antiracist book. If you want to fight racism, you have to make choices throughout your life to be on the side of the oppressed— choices that often come at a cost to yourself.

So instead of using a white publisher, I had the book printed in Denmark and shipped to the U.S., creating an informal network of ghetto street vendors in the big cities. I recruited the homeless and criminals like Alphonso's gang. They loved it: "Now we can make money for our drugs without going to jail."
More importantly, it created the one thing anti-racism always requires: dialogue.

When my book vendors approached white buyers, they had to control their rage and speak with empathy not to threaten them. "Don't hit the whites with a gun," I said. "Hit them over the head with the book. It has all your angry arguments in it." I taught these "losers" in almost the same words I taught the white "winners" in the universities: "Don't fear Blacks. Try to love them—and see the love returned."

Empathy is the first step to all reconciliation.

The experiment with gangsters didn't create real systemic change, but it created human encounters with uplifting dialogues between whites and blacks. Especially when I brought street people like Alphonso into the schools to talk to the students and persuade them to come into the ghettos to buy my book. Which they later did "in small nervous groups," Alphonso later told me.

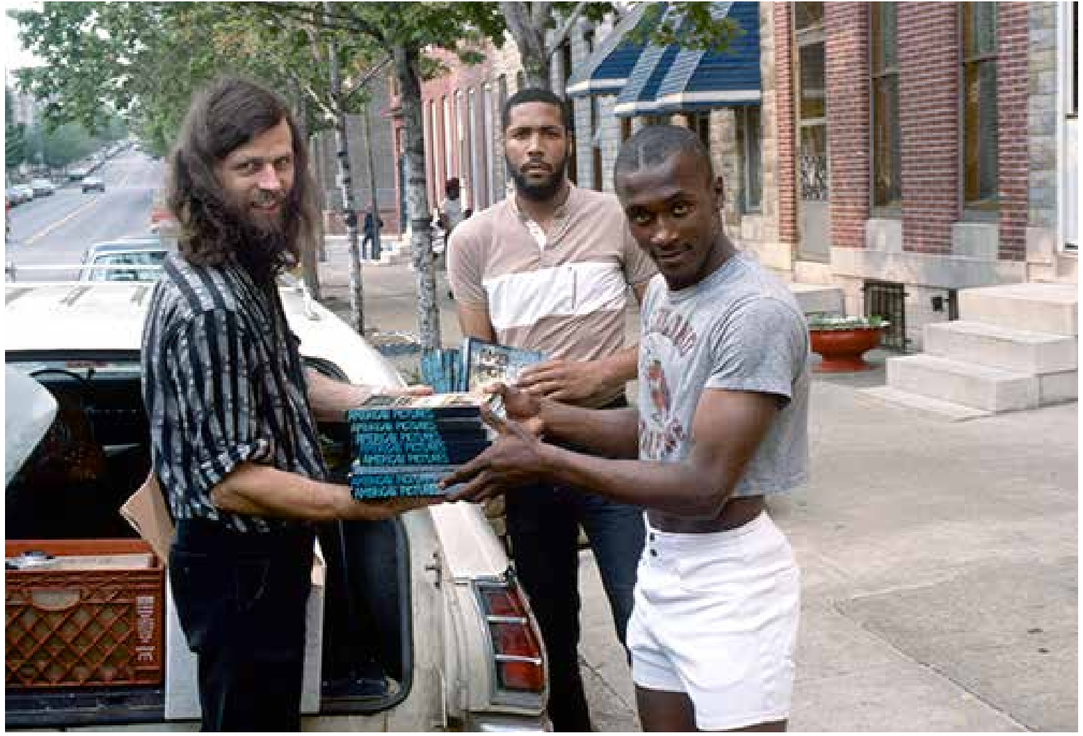
Not all were successful—some vendors, like Alphonso's son Nathaniel and a Philadelphia seller, were murdered before they could pay me, and many books in homeless shopping carts were ruined by rain—but the dialog was a learning experience for all parties.

I never understood how big a sinner Alphonso was until in 2005 he told my wife: "I don't know what happened when your husband came here and we tried to rob him and instead became friends. Because I'm not the Lord's best child. Since then, I've been in prison more than 40 times, and I've murdered two people. Last year alone, eight people on my block were murdered."

When I brought Alphonso's daughter Joann to my slideshow at Johns Hopkins Medical School, security was like entering Fort Knox—students were terrified of his gang, which haunted the streets outside where one of the doctors was kidnapped and found in a trunk. Yet his daughters miraculously both married pastors and dragged him into the church. Now I couldn't find him out on the streets on Sundays, Saturdays, or Wednesday nights, when he'd stand in the church and shout, "Hallelujah, I was a sinner, but I found God."

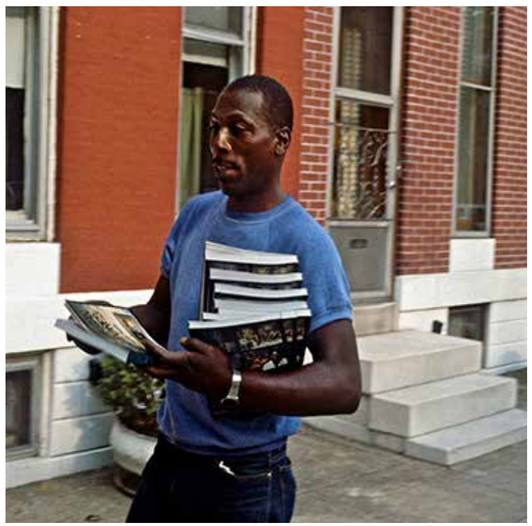
Now I had to sit reading the Bible with him, just as my wife and daughter joined in prayers on visits. I had always seen the deeper goodness and love in Alphonso, and through his daughters now saw how little it took to set him free—just as I've seen so many other "children of wrath" who were eventually freed from the chains of "sin" by saving angels. So "original sin" must never become a pillow to sleep on but a gracious call to our active intervention.
tion.

Trying to find Alphonso - on Danish TV in 1992



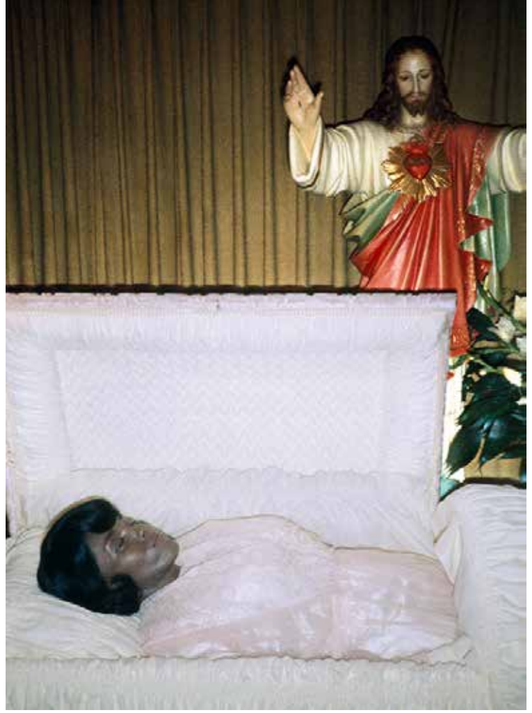
1985 in the streets of Johns Hopkins Medical School. I deliver books to Alphonso's son, Nathaniel, who was murdered before he could pay me up

1986 - Alphonso's gang selling books

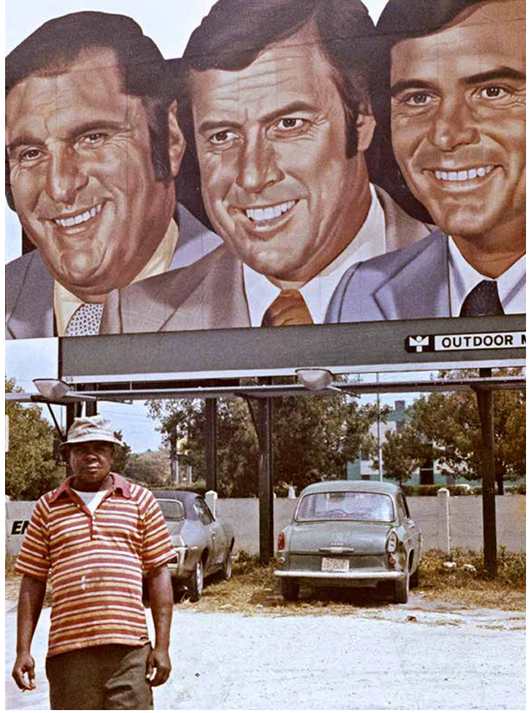


1986- Alphonso sells books. Most of his gang died from murder or AIDS. He died in 2014

1975 - San Francisco



1973 - Baltimore



1973 - Liberty City, FL

How Our Systemic Racist Thinking Erodes the Black Family

1973 - Zebulon, NC. Hugh, pictured here, later spent years in Central Prison

"The effects of internalized racism can be seen in many aspects of black life, from education and employment to health and mental health. It is a serious issue that needs to be addressed in order to create a more just and equitable society." - bell hooks

During my years as a drifter and into the '80s, I often heard liberal whites try to "explain" the economic assault on black families. Their theory on "the dysfunctional black family"—rooted in the Johnson administration's Moynihan Report—claimed that slavery had weakened black manhood, producing a so-called matriarchy that reproduced a "tangle of pathology," resulting in a population with no opportunity for success.

Whether Moynihan merely reflected or reinforced the racism and patriarchal assumptions of his time with its "blame the victim" approach, the effect was clear: massive gaslighting from above made many victims doubt their own experiences.

When continued oppression appeared to "confirm" these theories, the oppressed internalized myths that justified the power structure. White portrayals of ghetto men as weak were absorbed by many outcasts and produced low self-esteem.

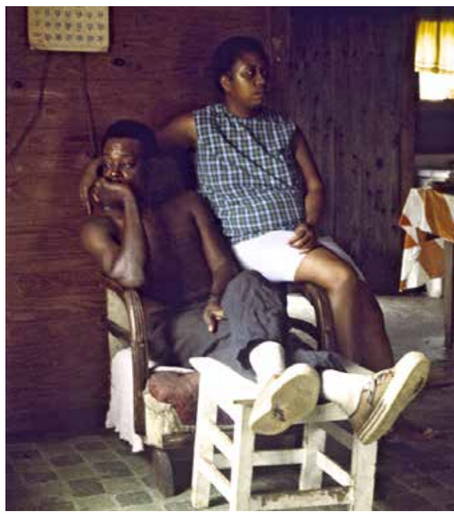
Lower-class men often devalued their own abilities and abandoned education and job training—fulfilling the very stereotypes that harmed them.

By the '80s I saw a widening rift between men and women in the ghettos, masking a new master-slave structure in which the "slave" was no longer needed. As unskilled laborers, these men were no longer needed in the US— nor were immigrants in Europe once low-income jobs moved to the Global South.

Today many on the left see this as purely "systemic racism." But blaming "something else" spares us the responsibility of confronting our own daily discrimination. The stubborn white resistance to affirmative action to give blacks access to the higher education —needed for blacks to rise out of the lower class—intensified until the Supreme Court struck it down in 2023.

We in the dominant caste must ask whether our political rhetoric contributes to the impoverishment of the subordinate caste. In moments of stress, any of us can fall into racist contradictions of insincerity endlessly exploited by politicians.

When we see rising marital violence among blacks or immigrants in Denmark, we focus only on the victims' tragedy. We ignore how our own morbid fixation on "the victim" damages our psyche—and how it may have helped create the despair behind this 26-year-old woman's murder by her unemployed husband.
What part did we ourselves play?



1975 - Troy, AL

Resistance and Repercussions in Relationships between Castes

"Intermarriage is one of the most provocative words in the English language." — Clotye Murdock Larsson, Marriage Across the Color Line

Opposition to interracial marriage—shaped by slavery and centuries of domination—runs deep in the American psyche. While the black man was framed as a threat, the black woman was dehumanized in systematic rape, public sale and whipping—one of history's most brutal contradictions: an entire people violated and afterwards blamed (just as African women in Saudi Arabia today). Moreover, the white woman's fear of "losing" her husband to the black woman was fueled by racist myths about black women's morality.
.
These wounds still linger. At Harvard Law School, some Black female students reacted strongly to my few photographs of bare-breasted Black women—all of which were later exhibited in museums as photographic art.

Their concern was not that I'd taken advantage of the women, who, despite intense peer pressure, had had the courage to give me shelter as a vagabond. For they knew how deeply black women had developed defenses after centuries of abuse by white men.
After reflection, it was agreed I could use the photos if I explained this context to white viewers. Their discomfort with my photographs also showed how harmful white beauty ideals had become for their own view of Black bodies and nudity.

Even when a Black women chooses to enter into a relationship with a white man, she often face resistance from her family. Leslie and I loved each other, and we were constantly hitchhiking across the country to meet each other and eventually wanted to get married. But despite the fact that her parents were very fond of me, both they and her siblings were categorically opposed to her marrying a (poor) white (vagabond).

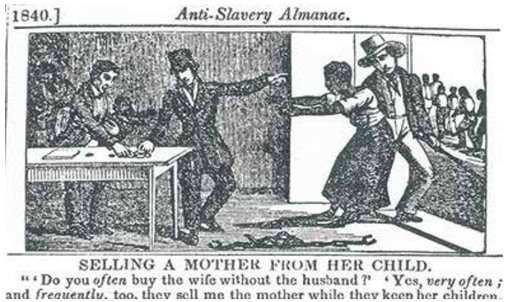
Later, she had a child with another white man—echoing a pattern I saw with the few Black women I dated: they all later married whites, though none of their siblings did. So my few mixed relationships were the result of exceptional women consciously breaking the deep-rooted social control minorities use for self-protection.

The same dynamic appears among Jews and European Muslims, who worry about losing identity through intermarriage. During World War II, European women were even punished for relationships with German soldiers. Although we today may struggle to understand such hostility toward love, the protective but restrictive resistance to "fraternizing" with the oppressor is still relevant. In the U.S. (where until Trump they traditionally felt more accepted), far more Muslims (about 40%) than Blacks (about 6%) marry outside their group—a stark reminder of how oppression shapes intimate life – and love.

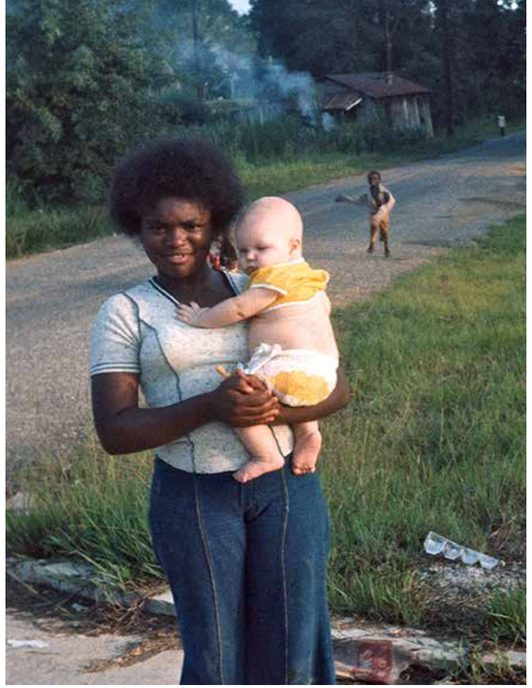
2004 - celebrating the 30-year anniversary for the wedding racism's social control had stolen from us ..... and again in 2015 -our 40-year anniversary

1973 - Hartford, CT

See my girlfriend Leslie about our rebellion against social pressure in the TV movie here from 2015

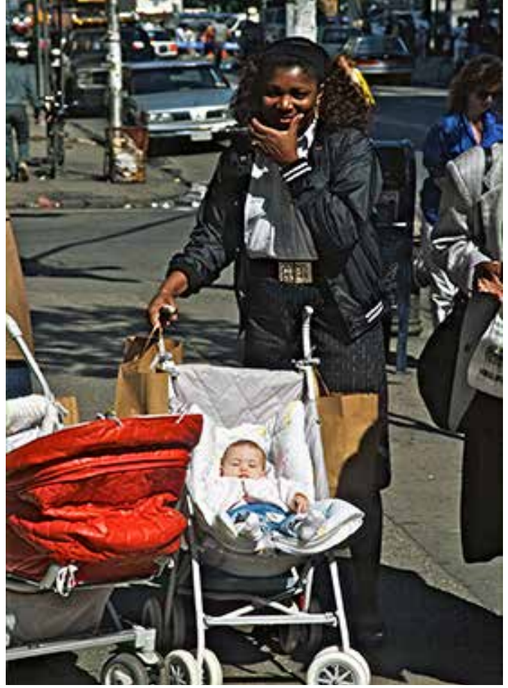


1974 - Charleston, SC - Nanny for child from the plantation home seen behind her



1975 - Philadelphia; MS. Leonora; daughter of my ex-wife's school friend

1974 - Ocala, FL - Nanny for investor's child



2015 - NY - Nanny for the rich on 5th Ave

The Double Bind: Black Women as Caregivers and Devalued Servants

"Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, 'the mule of the world,' because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else—everyone else—refused to carry." - Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens

Black women have long carried a double burden in white households: essential caregivers and simultaneously devalued servants. Many were forced to raise white children, which often pulled them away from their own families. They were expected to show affection while remaining subordinate in a society that denied their full humanity.

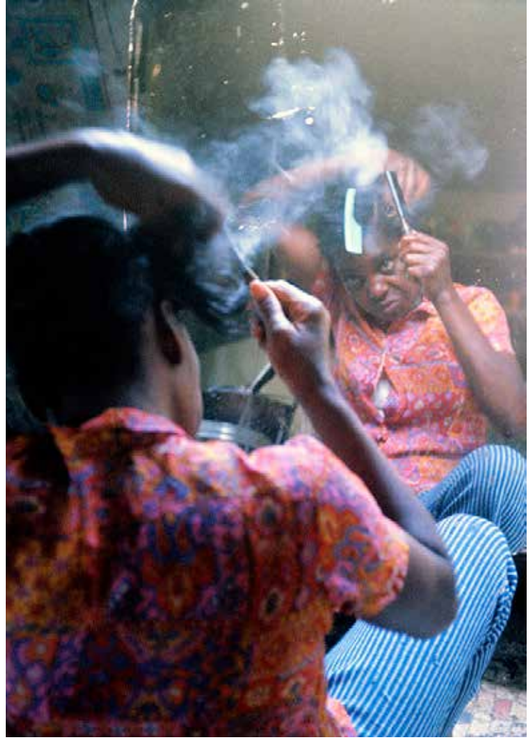
While white Southern womanhood was idealized, the "Aunt Jemima" stereotype portrayed the Black woman as the endlessly self-sacrificing "mama" who loves her white children as much as her own—strong enough to endure inhuman hardship—an image reinforced by watching her discipline her own children with a heavy hand to prepare them for life in a racist society Personally, I found this upbringing no harsher than among other ghettoized communities, such as in Denmark.

This dehumanization also damages the oppressor. In the South, white elites insisted on strict public separation while at home demanding intimacy with Black caregivers.

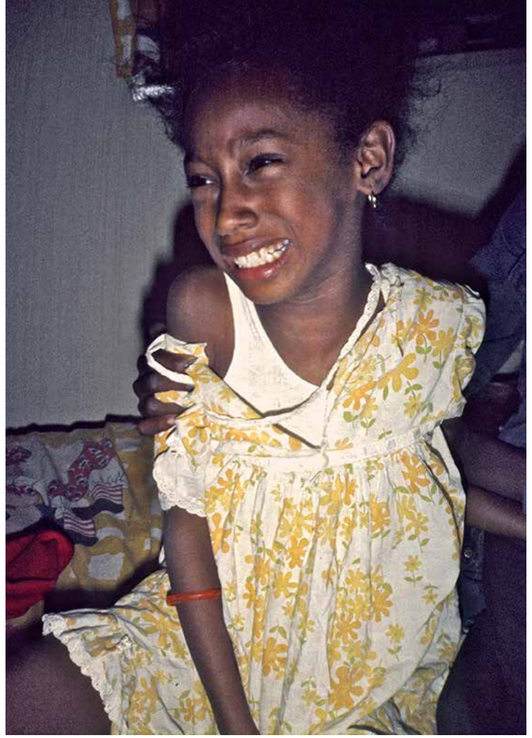
In my workshops—especially in elite universities—students often speak with tears about lifelong bonds with their Black nannies, bonds deeper than with their own parents. Yet shame followed when white parents returned unexpectedly, "catching" them in moments of tenderness. "I froze with shame," I often heard—feelings for a Black caregiver that they were taught were forbidden and that haunt them still.

Such tensions remain. The New York Post reported in 2018 that a white mother accidentally sent a racist text about her Black nanny to the nanny herself. She then fired her rather than face her. The nanny sued for breach of contract—proof that beneath today's surface, racial power and fear remain intact.

1974 - Charleston, SC - Black nannies caring for the children of the affluent whites



1974 - Tarboro, NC



1974 - Astoria, Queens, NY

1975 - Seattle

1975 - San Francisco

'Passing': The Internalized Oppression of Black Women

1971 - Baltimore

"It's funny about 'passing.' We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it."
—Nella Larsen, from her novel Passing

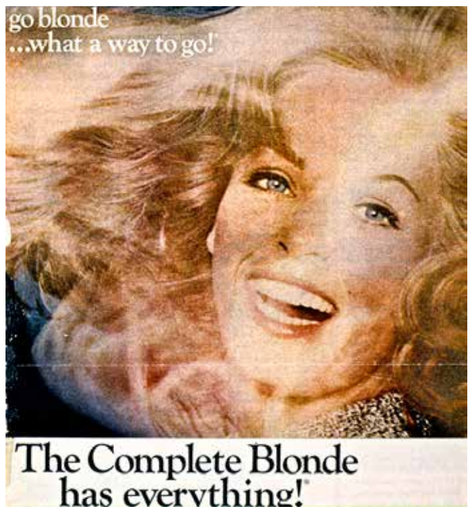
The historic worship of "pure" white femininity continues to shape beauty standards in advertising and culture, with devastating effect on non-white and religiously veiled women.

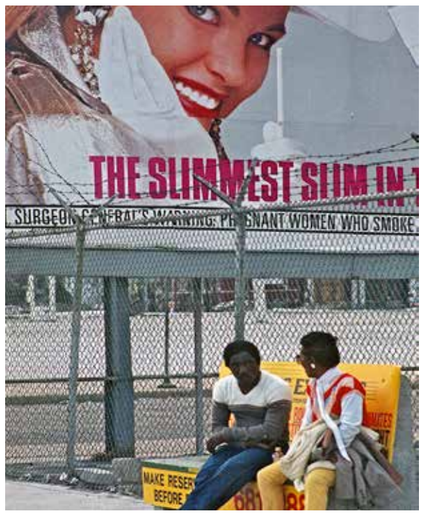
For generations they were told that fair skin and straight hair were the only acceptable ideals.

Many used skin-whitening creams and painful hair straightening methods to "pass" for white, turning beauty into a physical and psychological burden for their self-esteem and identity.

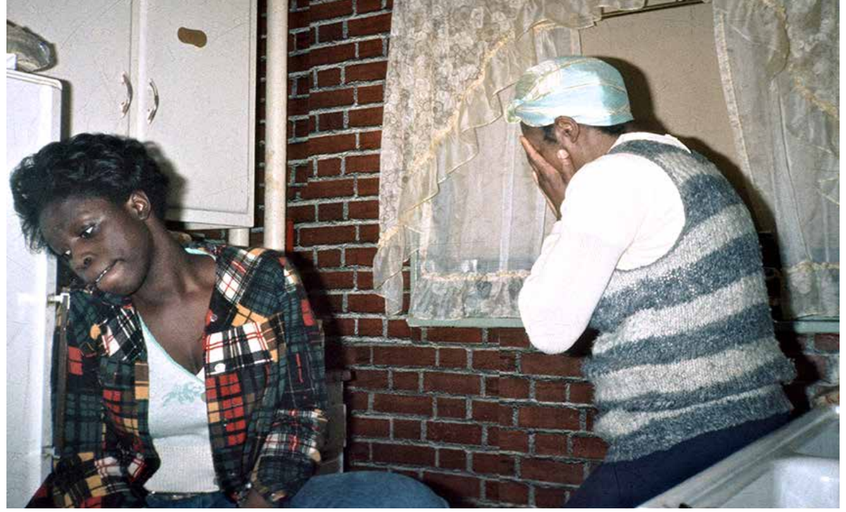
Their children, enduring virtual torture by flat irons heated over gas flames, learned to believe that becoming "acceptable" meant they must have been ugly to begin with.

Even though the Black is Beautiful movement challenged these harmful ideals, I still hear non-white children teasing each other for having dark skin and curly hair. Yes, our massive cultural "gaslighting" leaves deep scars.

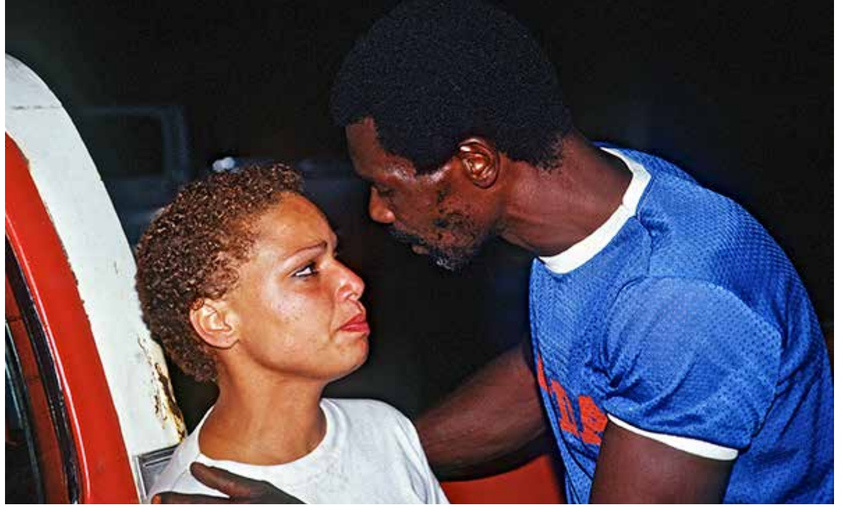




1990 - Chicago



1974 - Astoria, Queens, NY



1992 - Bullock County, AL

1995 - Pahokee, FL

Violence at the Crossroads of Caste and Womanhood

"The urgency of addressing violence against women of color is also about a larger question of narrative: whose story matters, whose life is valuable?" - Kimberlé Crenshaw

Historically, non-white women have faced multiple layers of intersectional violence. The fights I so often witnessed in lower-class homes convinced me that many black men's views of women had been shaped by white social ideals. What depresses me most is not that nearly 70 percent of black families are single-parent households, but what I saw in the ones still intact.

Few things are more painful than hearing white supremacist insults—"You ain't shit, nigger," or "ugly bitch"—echoing between these unhappy and powerless partners, and seeing the children internalize self-loathing: "I'm worse than shit!"

The frightening aspect of ghetto men constantly beating up "their" devalued women can be seen in the statistics: one-third of all domestic homicides are committed by blacks, though they are only 13 percent of the population.

Physical and psychological violence against women is a global endemic; that it is 35 percent higher among US blacks than whites only reflect the greater absence of men with stable jobs.

In Denmark, violence against immigrant women is exploding; they now make up 42 percent of shelter residents.
Yet we too see this violence as "their" culture rather than a consequence of our own marginalization.

I can't stress it enough that our failure to include these women and men in our social lives—as equals—mirror the way blacks feel unloved in America.

The violence we produce by denying belonging inevitably turns back on us. Intersectionality requires examining our part in this dynamic without slipping into paternalism.

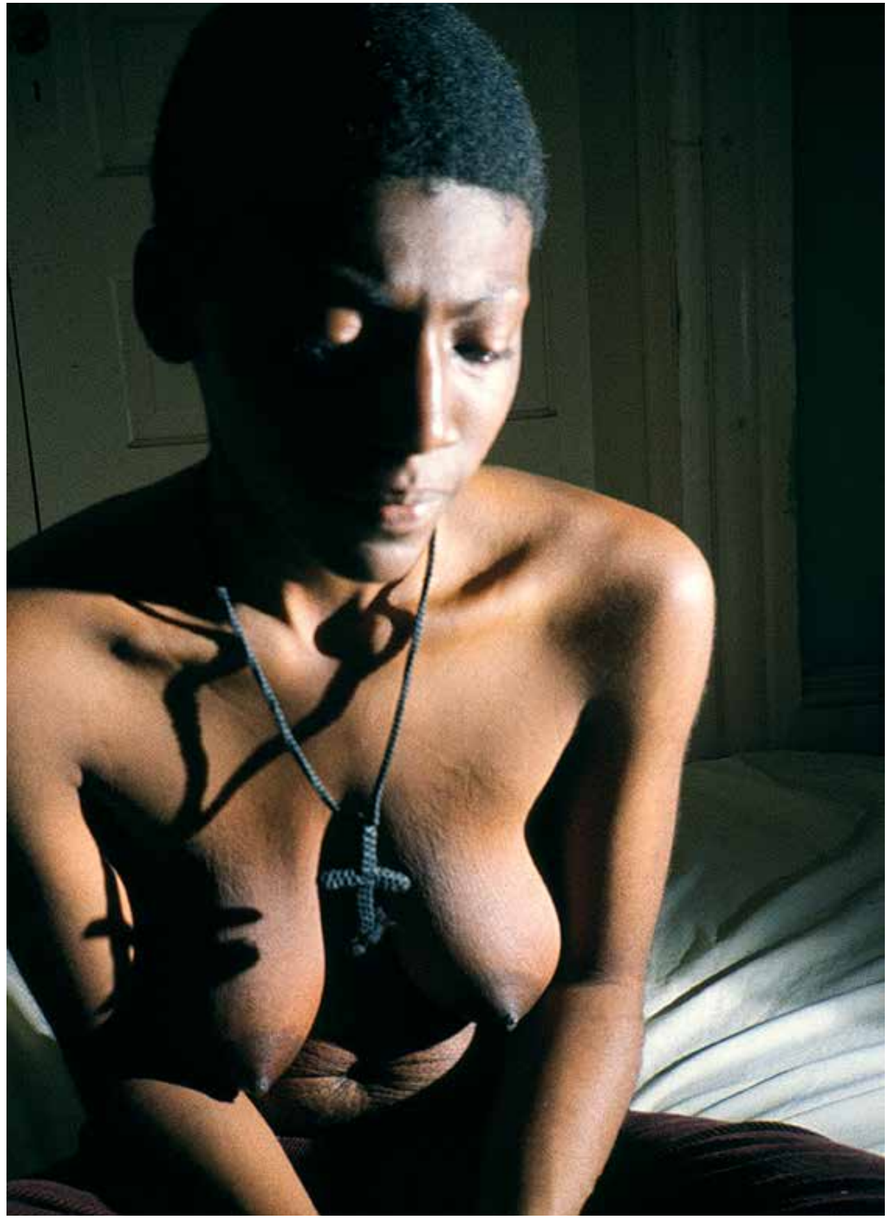
Bessie Christian seen on page 201 talking about the violence she suffered by her husband.

2003 - Philadelphia, MS

1996 - Selma, AL

1975 - San Francisco

1974 - NYC



1974 - Jacksonville, Fl and right in 1980 when Diane received my book and a Danish art piece inspired by the story

Luke 7, 36-50 - The Good Samaritan – American style

"Violence is mapped onto black women's lives so early and so deeply that survival itself becomes an act of resistance."
—Saidiya Hartman

"Black women's rage is a reasonable response to a world that refuses to protect them."
—Brittney Cooper

The only time I managed to talk someone out of a robbery was in Greensboro, North Carolina. I was living with a black social worker, Tony, whose father owned one of the worst bars in the ghetto. I spent many nights there. One night I met two young criminally inclined women and we decided I should go home with them. First we stole wine from a store, sprinting into a waiting taxi. In the back seat, I asked how they intended to pay since they had no money.
"Don't worry. When we get there, we'll knock him down and take his money." This surprised me—I hadn't tried mugging a taxi driver before—but I stayed quiet, something I'd learned in America.
Suddenly the driver turned around, and I realized I knew him: Tony's grandfather, owner of the biggest black cab company in town. For once, I intervened. I shouted "Stop!" and told him he could get the fare from Tony the next day. Then I tore the purse with the gun out of the woman's hands and pushed them both out of the car.
"That was Tony's grandfather, you idiots!" I yelled. They knew Tony, but that would hardly have stopped them; at least now they couldn't hurt him.

I was often shocked by the brutality some of these women displayed toward both men and women. That's why it was so overwhelming when a friendship developed between us and I got a glimpse of the warm humanity under the hard shell of violence and backstabbing.
Violence had shaped their everyday behavior so deeply that tenderness rarely had space to breathe. Their longing for another life was genuine, but the violent dynamic around them made it difficult for them to act differently. The longing was too often stifled by the constant tension with the ghetto's other prisoners.

Better-off blacks and whites didn't understand their struggle, and their disdain for ghetto culture only made things worse.
The empathy and warmth that might have flourished in a more supportive environment was difficult to maintain under the circumstances I experienced. It was heartbreaking to see how violence had become so much a part of their daily lives that even their attempts to care were often characterized by brutality.

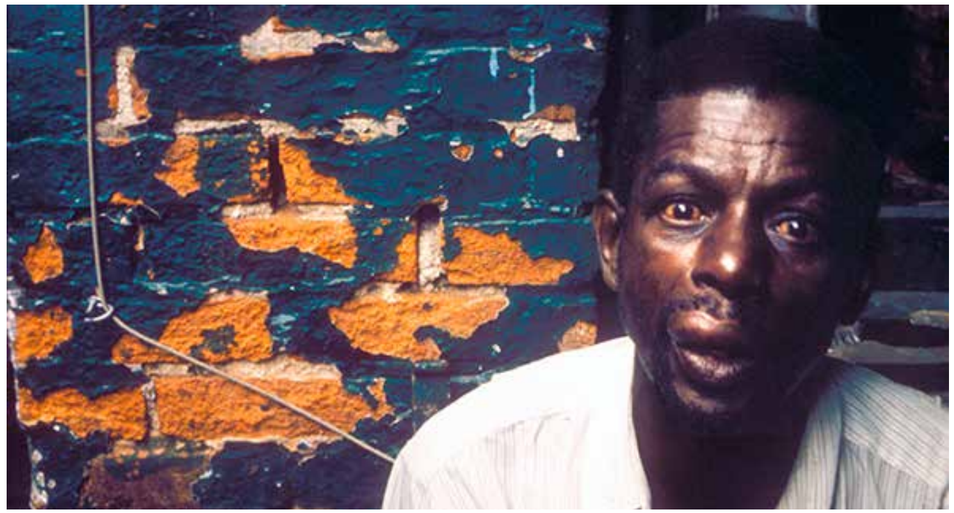
One rainy night in Jacksonville, Florida, I met Diane, a black woman who asked her mother to let me stay. Her mother refused to have a white man in the house. Diane then took me to a prostitute friend, but her boyfriend refused too. We walked around all evening trying one possibility after another. The prostitute became increasingly determined to find us a place to stay. They asked me to wait in a café – unaware that they had agreed she should "turn a trick" with a white taxi driver.
After a while they came running back, looking very upset, and said I must come quick. We got a motel room, and I saw they had far more than the usual ten dollars for a street "blow job", but wouldn't tell me how.

Only later did I learn what happened. She had lured the man into a dark alley, performed the act, then suddenly grabbed a brick and hit him. When he didn't fall, she used a steel pipe until he seemed dead, took his wallet, and ran. She felt she might as well take a bit more than the ten dollars so she could enjoy the night with a shot of heroin.

As the three of us lay in the motel bed, both women—deeply religious—prayed for hours: "Oh God, please don't let him die!" between attempts to find a vein to shoot up. By morning it was forgotten. They worried more about oversleeping and being late for church, where they should sing in the choir.

Letter to a friend (shortened)

PS. I followed my two Good Samaritans over the years. When I visited Diane in 2003, a little girl on the porch said, "Grandma's in prison." She was now in the same maximum-security prison as two other women in this book—all three grandmothers in one American prison. I often ask my European audiences: "Have you ever known a grandmother in prison? I know three in just one prison."



1973 - Baltimore

1974 - Oakland, CA

Måske sort baggrund her på højre side

1975 - Las Vegas, NV

Illusions of Abundance: The Unreachable American Dream

"We must face the reality that, as things now stand, the dream of equality will remain just that—a dream—if we do not begin to take dramatic steps to dismantle the structures of racial caste in America." - Michelle Alexander in "The New Jim Crow"

We prefer to think of the ghetto as a problem contained "over there," but every stereotype and exclusion we repeat helps recreate it. It becomes easier in our defense to condemn people than to confront the policies, markets, zoning laws, and tax structures that keep entire communities in chains.
Although our discriminatory barriers are built out of fear—and can stand only because our pariahs rarely threaten anyone but each other—they still create discomfort and anxiety in all of us.

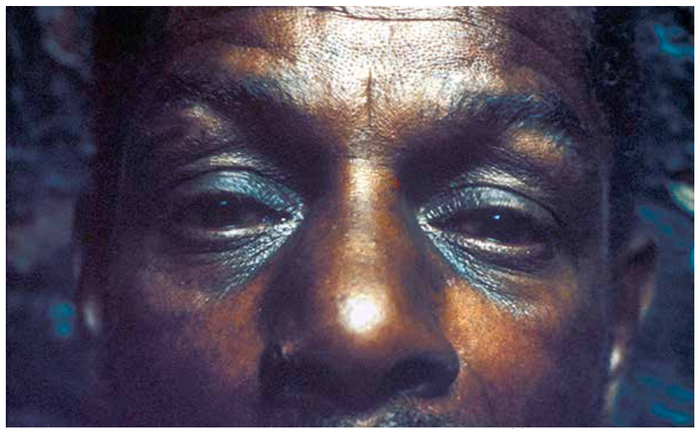
So even a homeless veteran challenges us when he asks for a dollar. Most of us avoid engaging with him directly because the system we created has shaped us as much as it shaped him. Without listening to people like him, we do not recognize the role we've played in their lives—from ignoring their contributions to the prosperity of our society to supporting the wars they've been sent to fight (for a freedom they rarely enjoyed).
Do we dare to come out of our echo chambers and face him?
Dare we admit the price he pays for our freedom? We praise freedom while outsourcing both the cost of that freedom and the suffering it produces to the most vulnerable.

We congratulate ourselves on charity, foreign aid, or "outreach," while ignoring the structures that harm the most vulnerable. We bombard the world's poor with talk of democracy and liberty while building bureaucratic fortresses, immigration walls, and intellectual alibis to keep them out.

You can get it if you really want - the powerfull song by Jimmy Cliff - illustrated

1973 - Baltimore

You can get it if you really want!
But you must try, try and try.
You'll succeed at last.
Persecution you must bear,
win or lose you got to get your share
but your mind set on a dream
the harder it seems now.
You can get it if' you really want.
Rome was not built in a day,
opposition will come your way,
but the harder the battle seems,
the sweeter the victory.
You can get it if you really want,
but you must try, try and try,
you'll succeed at last.



1973 - Baltimore

1974 - Apopka, FL

The paradox of a closed system in a free society

"History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do." – James Baldwin in "The White Man's Guilt"

I discovered striking differences in how the psychological terror of Florida's slave camps shaped Black people of different backgrounds. Jamaican workers, for example, always surprised me by keeping their camps neat, while African Americans scattered garbage everywhere.

Researchers link this to different historical forms of slavery. In Latin America and the Caribbean, slavery operated within more open, feudal structures where the Church protected slave families from being split up and offered limited avenues for upward mobility.

In the United States, slavery was capitalist: even the Church defined the slave as property, less than human, with no possibility of escape—not even in the mind. It was a closed system designed to extinguish hope.

American slavery has been compared to the German concentration camps, where scholars could observe how a fully closed system crushes the psyche. Diaries from imprisoned intellectuals show how quickly they were reduced to subhuman status, some even developing a resigned, almost conciliatory attitude toward camp guards (at least not outright hatred).

This produced widespread infantilism, irresponsibility, and total resignation.

It is tempting for liberals to use such theories to explain the present-day Black underclass, but this again shifts responsibility onto the victims. If we claim that Black Americans today reflect a "slave character" shaped 100 years ago, we perpetuate the racist idea that integration is impossible and blame the victim for it.

Instead, the enduring scars show that slavery is not past—it is present.
For when West Indian immigrants, who share a history of slavery, integrate more easily in America, it is not because of innate character traits, but because native-born Black Americans remain trapped in a society that still confines and shapes its undesirables inside a modern closed system.

1974 - NYC

1974 - Morehead City, NC

1974 - New Bern, NC

The Psychology of Oppression and Its Impact on Character

"Adults, "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl treasured. ....The death of self-esteem can occur quickly, easily in children, before their ego has 'legs,' so to speak. Couple the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which in its language, laws, and images, re-enforces despair, and the journey to destruction is sealed." — Toni Morrison, from The Bluest Eye

Until I understood the closed ghetto system, I was always astonished by how the minds of underclass children became crippled. Most young Black children I meet are vibrant and full of life. But later they often seem depressed and withdraw into a protective shell not to absorb our all-pervasive oppressive thinking about them.

Very early they adopt our negative expectations, and by fourth grade many lose faith in themselves, their abilities, and their future.

Becoming aware of the closed system, they lose motivation and fall behind whites in school—just as we see with our unloved brown children in Denmark.

The clearest sign of our oppression is Black self-hatred—the kind that makes ghetto children tear hair out of their Black dolls or draw themselves in the corner of the page (white children place themselves in the center). It's the self-disdain that leads to violence against their surroundings, from strewn trash to "backstabbing" both verbal and literal.

Everyone suffers some self-loathing, but the underclass experiences it so severely that it helps create one of the world's highest rates of crime, family breakdown, and perhaps the smallest degree of mutual trust.
Seeing how aggression among the oppressed is directed toward fellow victims rather than the oppressor—witnessing the uncontrollable anger of many American Blacks—we begin to understand the effect of the closed system we've confined them to: the ghetto, or slavery here and now.

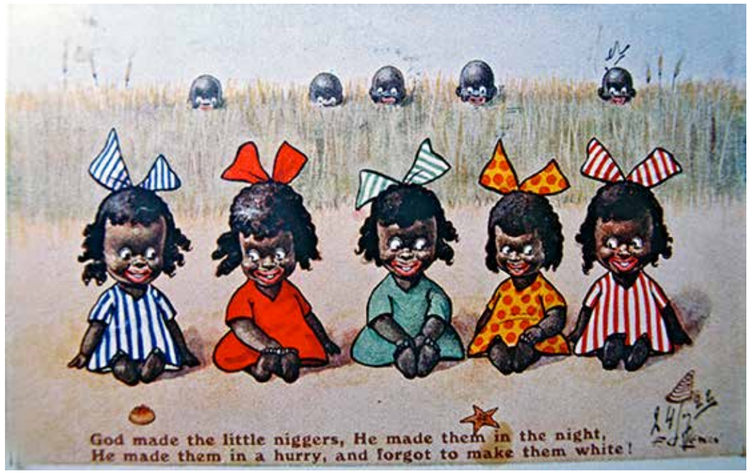
1996 - rural Selma, AL

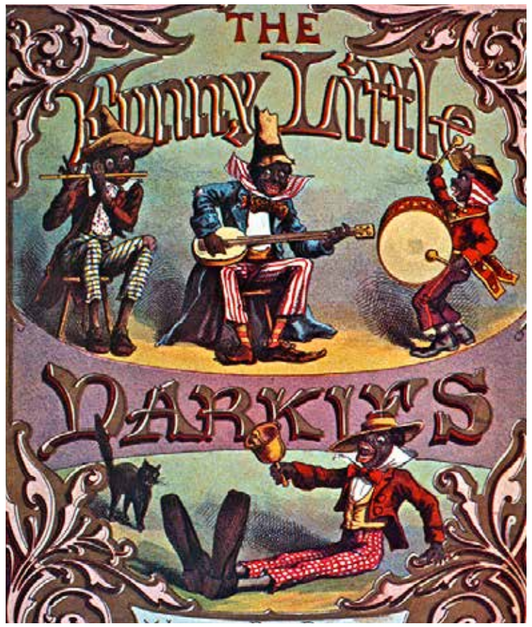
The lasting mark of oppression: How it shapes the lives of our excluded

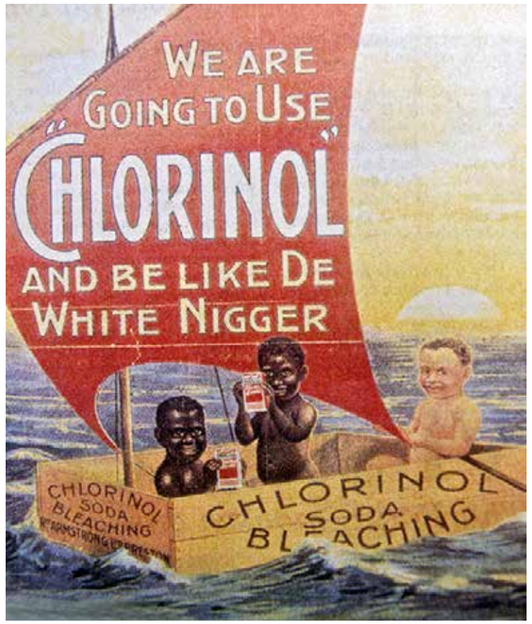
"The worst crime the white has ever committed was to teach us to hate ourselves." - Malcolm X

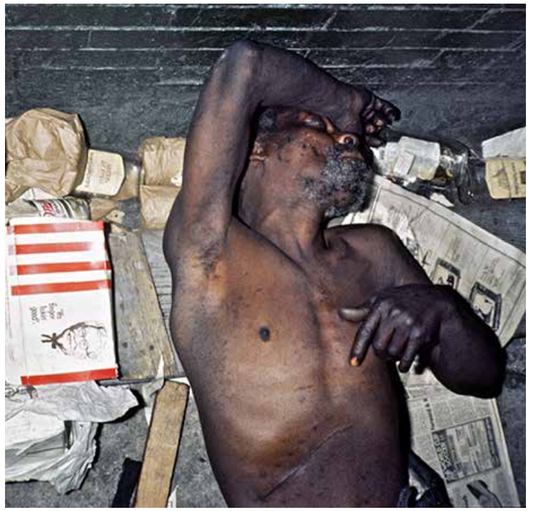
"No other group has internalized its self-hatred as much as blacks have. It would be difficult to find other groups who behave similarly in that their most esteemed members berate its poorest members." - Michael Eric Dyson

"It is human nature to hate the one whom you have hurt." - Tacitus

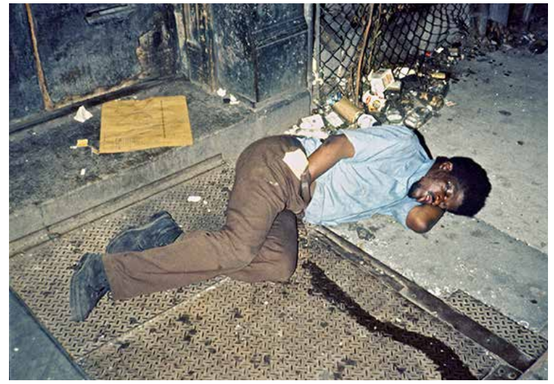








1974 - NYC

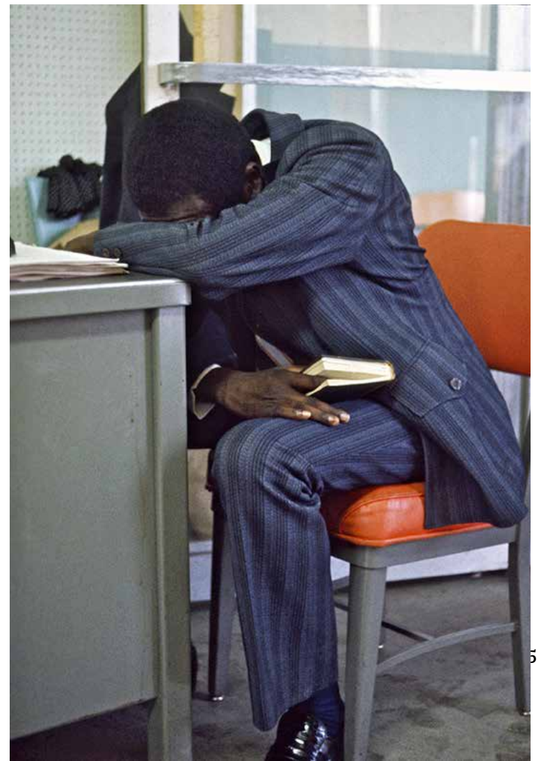


1974 - NYC

1992 - NYC - Right 1974 - Liberty City, FL

Brother, what a price I paid!
You stole my history,
destroyed my culture,
Cut off my tonque so I can't communicate.
Then you humiliate, then you separate,
hide my whole way of life
so myself I should hate!

Brother, what a price I paid - song by Jimmy Cliff - illustrated



Black figures in the Danish National Museum

1989 - rural VA

"We must resist the temptation to internalize the negative images of ourselves that are projected onto us." - bell hooks

"The purpose of racism is to dehumanize and to degrade, to diminish and destroy." - Roxane Gay

Brother, what a price I paid!
You took away my name,
put me to shame,
made me a disgrace
the world's laughing stock.
Made of me a show, to jeer and to mock,
but your time is at hand
so you better watch the clock!

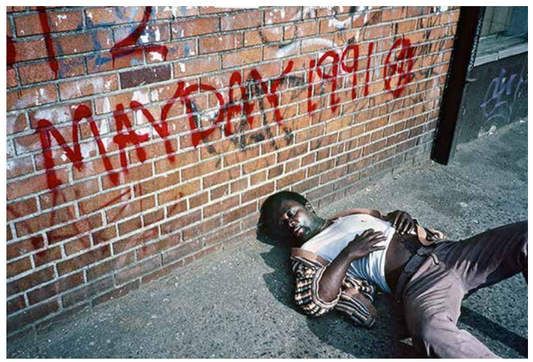
1986 - restaurants throughout the South

1974 - Jacksonville, FL

1989 - rural VA

1990 - set på universiteterne hvor jeg holdt foredrag

2000 - NYC



1992 - NYC

Historical photo: White colonizer carried by Africans

From the shores of Africa, mainland of Asia,
The Caribbean and Mississippi
Central and South America.
First you humiliate,
then you separate,
you hide my whole way of life
so myself I should hate.
Brother, what a price I paid!
Sister, what a price I paid!
Mother, what a price I paid!

1973 - near Natzhez, MS

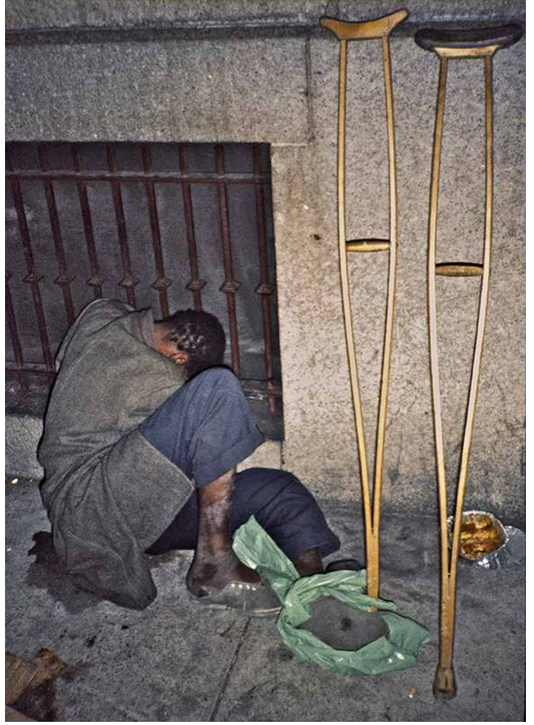
1973 - New Orleans

2008 - White with black driver after seeing “Les Miserable” on Broadway, NY

1997 - NYC

1973 - Philadelphia, PA

1973 - Baltimore



1975 - NYC

1973 - NYC

1973 - NYC

Muligvis sort baggrund

How Immigrant Blacks overcome the Legacy of Slavery

"There is a certain sense of pride that West Indian blacks have, which I think comes from our history of resisting colonialism. We were never slaves in the same way that American blacks were slaves." - Michael Eric Dyson, professor of African-American studies

"I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America." - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Americanah

During my journey through the nation with the loudest talk of upward mobility, the persistence of a closed system remained a paradox for me.
I could never accept the explanation of Black "inferiority"—the old lie whites carry deep in the heart: "Our ancestors came over dirt poor and made it. Why can't they?"

A veil lifted when I met two such "poor immigrants": Lidy Manselles from Haiti and Mrs. Pabst from Russia. It's no coincidence Lidy became my first Black girlfriend. At first, American-born Black women seemed untouchable, locked behind an invisible barrier, whereas Lidy came from another—freer—world.

I understood this difference the day we spoke to an alcoholic on a doorstep in Harlem. Suddenly Lidy blurted out, "Why don't you get a job?" Her contempt ended the conversation. Later she said, "I hate them. I hate these lazy animals." I sensed immediately this was a clash deeper than nationality: the disdain of a free culture toward an enclosed slave culture. Jet-black and Catholic, Lidy embodied the "white Protestant work ethic" far more than many native-born Americans.

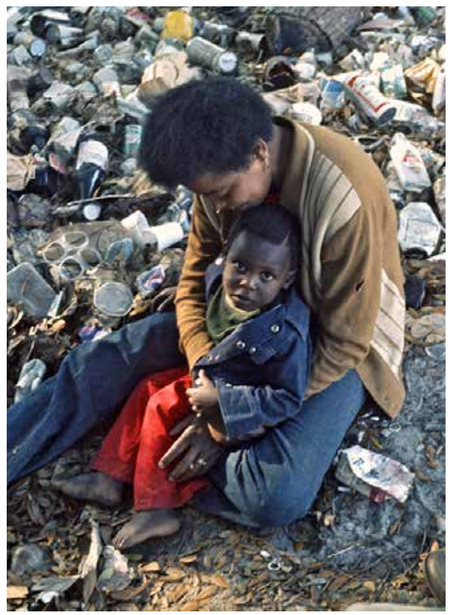
Through her I entered the tight West Indian community in Brooklyn. Like earlier immigrants who arrived without chains, they worked ferociously, saved money, prized education, bought homes, and spoke endlessly about strong family. Fiercely opposed to welfare—unlike surrounding Black communities where 40% were on welfare—their neighborhoods were as clean and as prejudiced toward native Blacks as Italian or Irish districts.

Within a generation, their income reached 94% of the American average—even including new, poorer arrivals. Since 1% of the population owns over 30% of the wealth, West Indian immigrants are doing better than most whites, despite coming from poorer and less educated countries. In contrast, native Blacks earn only 61% of white income.

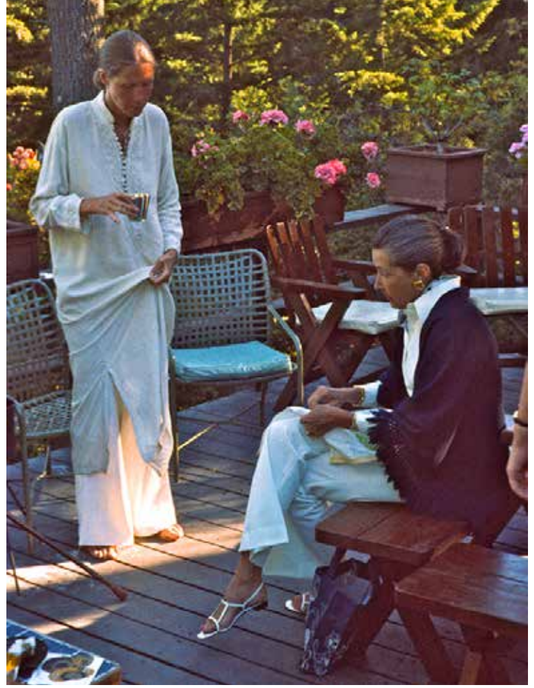
President Johnson's reforms gave them a rate of progress which might have given them equality in 500 years, but under Nixon, Reagan, Bush and Trump, they slipped backwards. Until the 1960s, a third of all Black professionals were in fact immigrants. In many elite universities, their descendants make up to 85% of Black students, though they are only 6% of America's Black population.

So why can't more native-born Blacks reach Harvard or Yale? The fact that these tiny islands—poorer and with fewer resources—produce so much talent reveals the depth of American racism. Their historical slavery was as cruel as America's; they come from the same African tribes. So why are immigrant Blacks nearly twice as successful?

I often saw white American tourists making friends with blacks in the West Indies, whom they found "proud and independent," though they had no friends among their own "broken" and "dependent" Blacks back home. While fear and hatred still characterized black-white relations in the US, lynchings, cross burnings and race riots, as well as self-defense groups like the NAACP and Black Panthers, were totally unknown in Brazil.



1974 - Apopka, FL



1975 - Palo Alto, CA - Mrs. Pabst and daughter on mountain ranch of the Pabst family

My explanation is that after slavery ended, whites withdrew from the West Indies, leaving behind a society where black people could rebuild dignity, find role models among their own, and restore the self-confidence shattered by slavery.

In the U.S., however, blacks continue to live alongside a white majority, whose power to define and dominate often undermines their self-esteem.
Without a strong belief in themselves, many black parents cannot reassure their children with the same conviction as West Indian or Jewish parents: "Yes, my child, there is racism here—but you can still make it if you work twice as hard."

The initiative and resourcefulness of black immigrants aren't destroyed by facing, daily, the structural racism that's so detrimental to many native-born blacks.

The psychological resilience of black immigrants allows them to thrive, just as European Jews often did despite anti-Semitism.

Not surprisingly, my native black friends in Hartford call West Indians "go getters" or "black Jews." Their native admiration acknowledges the freedom of mind immigrant blacks often bring with them.

Mrs. Pabst, like Lidy, also arrived broke but not broken. Though she lost everything in the Russian Revolution, she kept her upper-class acculturation—enough to marry back into money (Pabst Brewing Company), like the many in America's top one percent born into wealth. Her family now owns several mansions around the world, and I once stayed with them on a $3 million California farm.

I liked Mrs. Pabst, intensely interested as she was in art and culture. Hoping she might help me buy film, I showed her my photos—among them this little boy in a muddy ditch. His world could not be farther from that of her granddaughter being served by a maid. Without the Pabst label on the beer cans, one would hardly guess these lives belong to the same society and that their lives are in some way connected.

But when Mrs. Pabst saw my images of people defeated by apathy and alcoholism, she exploded: "I hate them! I hate these lazy animals! Why don't they want to work?"
Yet where does the gold in her ears truly come from—
and why is there no work for those she calls "animals"?

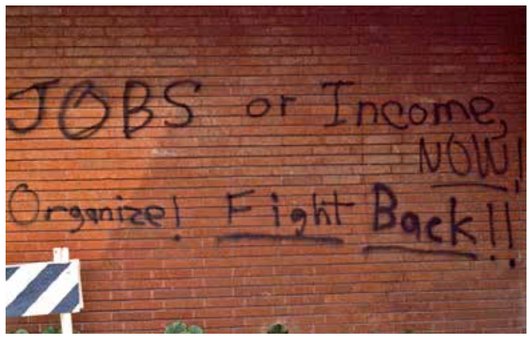
Always the last ones hired

" 'Last hired, first fired' isn't just about jobs; it's about a way of seeing Black people. It's about the idea that we're less capable, less worthy, less deserving. It's about a system that is stacked against us from the very beginning."
— Ta-Nehisi Coates

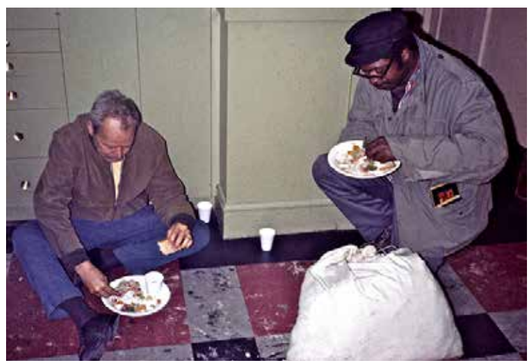
Sing a song of sad young men,
glasses full of rye.
All the news is bad again
kiss your dreams goodbye.
All the sad young men
sitting in the bars
drinking up the night
and missing all the stars.
All the sad young men
drifting through the town
drinking up the night
trying not to frown.
All the sad young men,
singing in the cold
trying to forget
that they are growing old.
All the sad young men
choking on their youth,
trying to be gay
running from the truth.
Autumn turns the leaves to gold
slowly dies the heart.
Sad young men
are growing old,
that's the cruelest part.
Misbegotten moon
shines for a sad young man,
let your gentle light
guide them all again.
All the sad, sad, sad young men.

Roberta Flack

1972 - Chicago



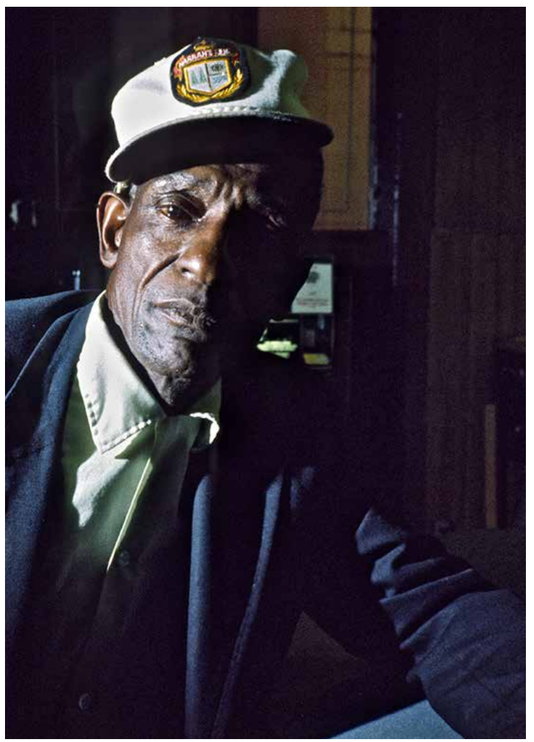
1975 - San Francisco



1975 - San Francisco

Sad young men - song by Roberta Flack - illustrated

1975 - San Francisco



1975 - San Francisco

1975 - San Francisco

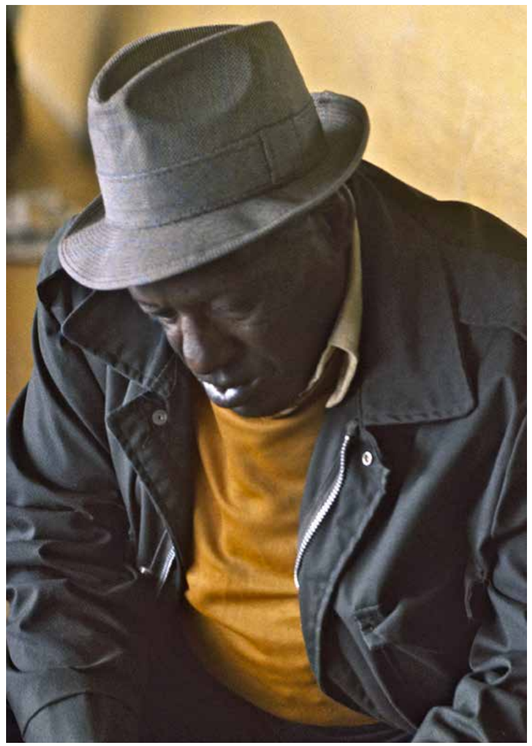
1973 - New Orleans

1975 - San Francisco

1974 - Raleigh, NC

1974 - Raleigh, NC

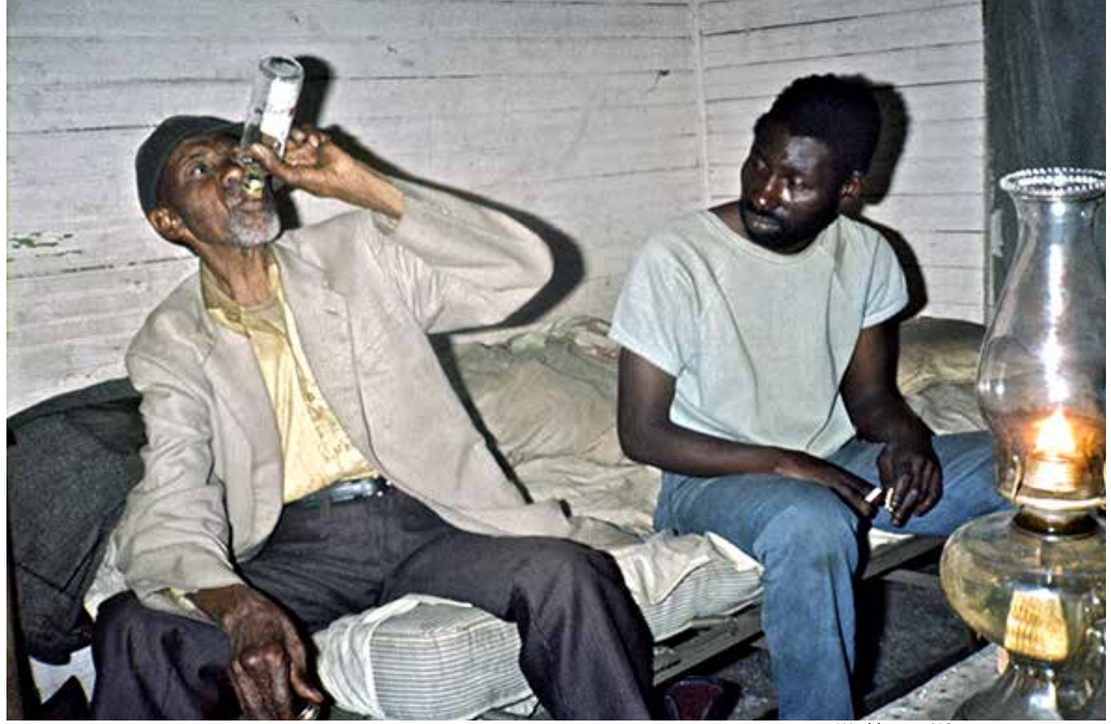
1975 - Seattle, WA



1975 - Seattle, WA

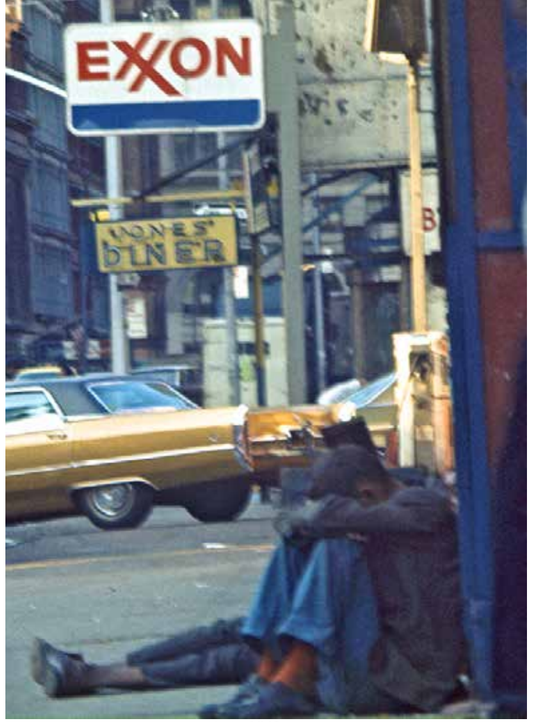
1974 - Raleigh, NC

Muligvis sort baggrund



1974 - Washington, NC - story on page 110

1974 - Buckhannon, WV - Jay Rockefeller



1971 - NYC

Hitch-hiking from freezing Prejudice to the warmth of Understanding

"The rich are different from us, because they have more money, but they've outsmarted us, as a class. They've outsmarted us every step of the way, and we've let them. We've let them buy our politicians and tell us that their interests are our interests." - Ta-Nehisi Coates

I am often asked how I ended up staying with the Rockefellers—and why. Here is the story.

I left Washington, DC, one spring morning in 1974 intending to see poor coal miners in West Virginia. Because it was warm, I set off in shirtsleeves, unaware that spring arrives three weeks later in the mountains. Soon I was caught in a snowstorm at the intersection of Rt. 50 and Interstate 79.

Mountain people rarely pick up hitchhikers—"not even my own son," one man said. And seeing someone in a snowstorm without a coat, most drivers assume you're an escaped convict. I stood there the whole day, too frozen to raise my thumb.

Yet the more I suffered, the more certain I became that something extraordinary would happen. As a vagabond I'd developed a near-religious belief in suffering—that only through suffering do you enter heaven, and that conviction itself can melt the mountains, or cold hearts, around you.

After dark, my sign identifying me as a Dane finally brought a ride from two lawyers. One invited me to stay the night in Charleston. Comfortable enough—though hardly "heaven."

Half an hour down the interstate one said, "In there is Buckhannon, where Rockefeller lives..." and at once I understood why I had frozen all day. I asked them to let me out.

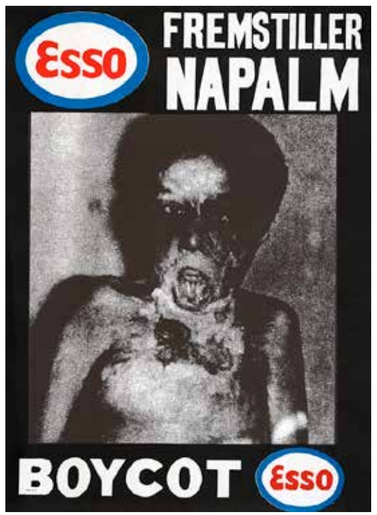
Then I started the 13-mile walk along a deserted mountain road—still in the storm, still in shirtsleeves. In town I asked for directions. He was president of West Virginia Wesleyan College, and soon I found his house on Pocahontas Street.

To explain this moment, I must go back to my protests against the Vietnam War. Outraged by America's use of napalm—which incinerated thousands, including children—I designed a poster at my own expense: ESSO makes napalm. I pasted it across Copenhagen, often chased by police.

One freezing December night I escaped them by climbing a tall tree. Two amused cops parked beneath me: "You can sit up there all night and freeze while we stay warm and drink coffee." I refused to come down, and by morning they gave up.
Esso had to hire workers to paint over the logo everywhere to stop the spreading boycott of their gas stations.

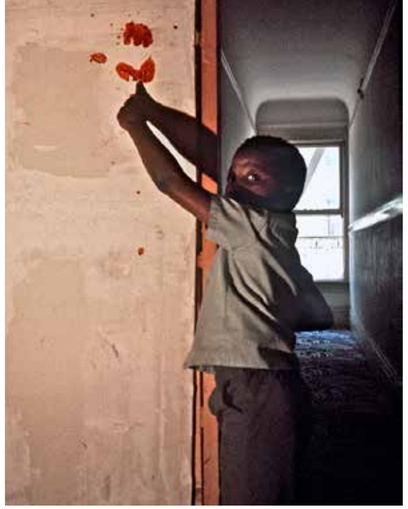
That boycott taught me not only the power of advertising—my first "advertisement"—but also filled me with a vivid hatred of the monster behind Esso: the Rockefellers.

I learned they had ordered the killing of 51 striking men, women, and children in Colorado in 1914, and with CIA help had overthrown governments, including in Iran, installing the torturing Shah to prevent Iran from nationalizing its oil wells.
So, when I reached Pocahontas Street—cold, furious, and filled with déjà vu from that freezing night in the tree—
I felt entitled to face the monster himself.
And I knocked on the door.



1969 - My campaign to boycott ESSO

1974 - Valerie Rockefeller



Boy showing where his family member was killed - 1975 SF

Is the trauma of the upper class just an echo of the trauma of the lower class?

"Lead poisoning is a form of environmental racism. It is a silent killer that disproportionately affects black children." - Majora Carter

And what happened? The same thing that always happens when I move in with the monsters in my head: a beautiful young woman opened the door. I assumed she was one of many servants and asked, quite naturally—after all, I had a right to be there—"May I see Mr. Rockefeller?"
She said he wasn't home, but I could come in and wait.
Although I myself looked like a monster of sorts—a snow monster—she probably thought I was a student from his university. She handed me towels to dry myself and asked whether I was hungry. If so, she'd start cooking, since she didn't know when her "husband" would be home.
Husband? I thought. All the hateful caricatures I'd absorbed of "Rockefeller" had been of old men, especially after Nelson Rockefeller's massacre at Attica, where prisoners demanding reform were killed. I'd been at the funeral and knew some of the widowed Black women (page 406).
But Sharon Rockefeller, as she was called, was almost my age, and her husband, Jay, only ten years older.

While she cooked, I played with her adorable three-year-old daughter, Valerie. Seeing how well we got along, Sharon suggested that perhaps I could stay and look after her; she was going to Europe in a few days and hadn't yet found a babysitter.

A little later a family friend dropped by. While we chatted, she whispered that Valerie was named after Sharon's twin sister, who had been murdered. "Murdered? How?" I asked in disbelief. I was used to murders in the underclass, not among the wealthy. After Sharon (née Percy) and Valerie had graduated from college, the family had gathered in their lakefront mansion outside Chicago. Sharon went to say goodnight to her sister, and the next morning her identical twin was found beaten and stabbed to death. The crime was never solved. It left Sharon traumatized and cast a dark shadow over the family that never fully lifted.
At the time I wasn't surprised that Sharon trusted me so quickly; people usually did. But over the years I've reflected on her courage. How many women, so soon after a beloved sister was murdered by an intruder, would invite into their home a stranger who looked like Charles Manson?

When Jay Rockefeller finally came home, I lost my heart to this warm-hearted family. Since I was immersed in conversation with Sharon, he assumed I was her friend and never asked why I was there—just as I myself had forgotten. If I'd expected to meet a monster, that was my own projection.
To my surprise and joy, we agreed on almost everything. He opposed the Vietnam War and later criticized war hero John McCain for dropping napalm on civilians. After college he'd traveled the same road I had, working with poor coal miners living in shacks like those I'd photographed. Through the VISTA program, started by JFK, he fought to improve their conditions and never left them behind—first as governor, later as senator. I felt immediately that he was "my man."

1974 - Charleston, SC

Sharon Rockefeller with Valerie in 1974

After we'd drunk quite a few bottles and he'd shown real interest in my photos, I told him I'd tried in vain to get support for a professional Nikon camera and film. I'll never forget his reply: "Are you talking to me as a person or to the foundation? Come up to my office tomorrow and show me your grant proposal." I could hardly sleep. For the first time, I felt real hope—if only for babysitter money.

But when I reviewed the application I always carried, I saw a sentence about "the Rockefeller clan's brutal slaughter of 41 prisoners at Attica."
I'd forgotten it was there. After the warmth and trust I'd been shown, I couldn't bring myself to knock on his door. Instead, I turned around and continued my vagabonding, invoking the old Rockefeller slogan: neither "a dime for the bank nor a penny to spend."

Angry with myself for my prejudice, I framed a new insight: the underclass syndrome of murder and alcoholism mirrors that of the ruling class. The alcoholism part referred to other upper-class families I'd known, not this one, which had shown me such generosity.

Two days later I stayed with a woman in a shack directly beside an Exxon refinery. Beyond my love-hate relationship with the Exxon logo, there was another reason I ended up there.
During my first year in America, Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act to eliminate lead from gasoline. Leaded gas, introduced by Standard Oil for its "anti-knock" effect, had been fiercely defended by Exxon.
Just before breaking my own "anti-knock" vagabond rule in Jay and Sharon's house, I'd heard new studies about lead's devastating effects on children. I thought of all the Black children growing up in ghetto homes near highways (page 299). This helped explain why violence and murder surged about twenty years after leaded gas became widespread. (This boy showed me the blood from someone in his family who'd just been murdered.) Lead also plays a major role in learning disabilities, helping explain why many white children, like Valerie, did better in school.

Seventeen years later, after a show at Stanford, a white woman asked to speak with me privately. "I'm in your book," she said angrily. I was confused—there were hardly any whites in it. Then I realized she was Valerie Rockefeller. "Last year my roommate told me you portrayed my father as an alcoholic mass murderer," she said.

"I was furious. But now that I've seen the show, I want to give you a warm hug." She handed me her card. "If you ever need help, call me."
Again I felt guilt for not distinguishing clearly enough between Exxon—the symbol—and the family who had taken me in. I later encountered the same reaction from three other Rockefeller children, who even asked my advice on how best to serve the poor.

So, I wasn't surprised when Valerie, whose weighty baggage was both negative and positive, became a special-education teacher in East Harlem for adolescents with learning and emotional disabilities. I could trace a line from our first meeting to her adult commitment. Above all, she was shaped by her parents' long social engagement. As with Black children's inherited trauma, I wondered whether she also carried some of her mother's—but I've never asked.

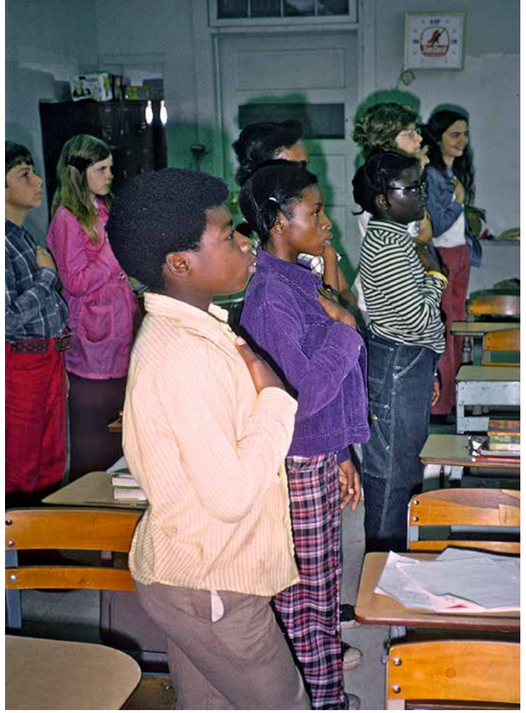
When we last communicated again in 2023, now as head of the Rockefeller Foundation, I was astonished, as with her father, by how much we agreed. "I'm still hyper-critically judgmental of people with money," she wrote. She's also active in the Rockefeller family's effort to confront ExxonMobil's climate denial. "As descendants," Valerie says, "we have an extra burden to fight climate change."

1974 - Washington, NC

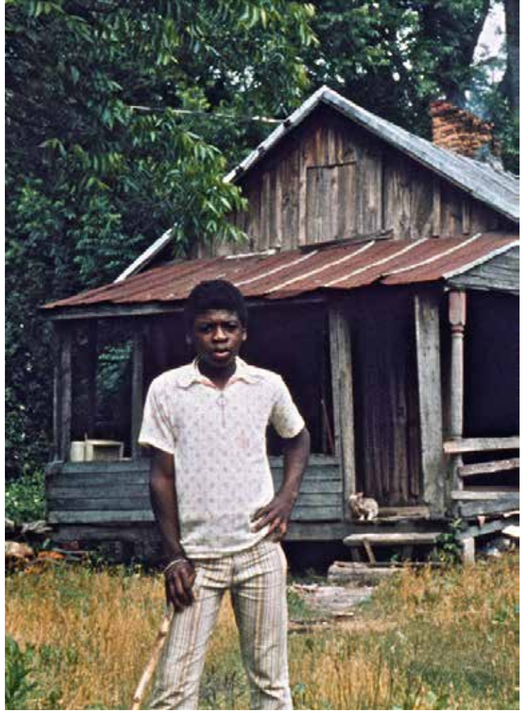
1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

1973 - Tunica, LA



1974 - Washington, NC. Robert in school



1974 - Washington, NC. Robert at home

Separate and unequal: The Mis-Education in Black and White

"Education is indoctrination if you're white - subjugation if you're black." - James Baldwin

The integration of Black and white schoolchildren was one of the greatest gains of the civil rights struggle. Yet many better-off liberals avoided letting their own children integrate, helping to sabotage the process and fueling resentment among poor whites who could not afford private schools.

Seeing American school conditions was perhaps the most shocking part of my journey. I'd never heard so many brainwashing slogans—"Men treasure freedom above all else"—paired with an almost total omission of Black history. Today, some schools even ban books by Black authors such as Toni Morrison, or books that simply teach "critical thinking."
This totalitarian uniformity, replacing independent thought, mirrors the daily "Pledge of Allegiance" to "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." The pledge's ideals stand in painful contrast to the near-slavery imposed on Black children in the dilapidated, plywood-windowed ghetto schools I saw.

In theory we happily grant "freedom and justice" to Robert, seen here pledging allegiance in Washington, NC—only to walk home to his shack, with more rats than books. At least covering the windows with the stars-and-stripes helps keep the cold—and the American Dream—out.

1974 - Washington, NC

1972 - Canarsie, NY

1972 - NYC

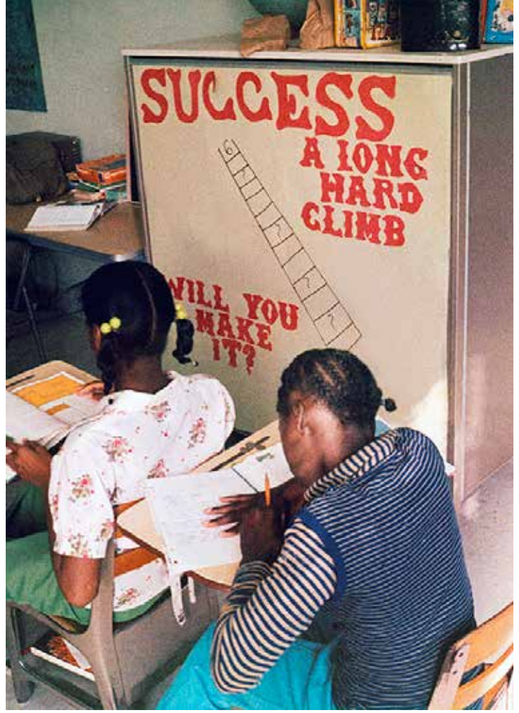
1973 - Louisville, KY

1972 - Canarsie, NY

1974 - South Boston

1972 - Canarsie, NY

1974 - South Boston



1974 - Washington, NC

White flight's violence against black children

"The school system in the South was set up to perpetuate the myth that black people were inferior to white people. The school system in the North was set up to perpetuate the myth that black people didn't exist." – James Baldwin

I saw violent struggles across the country where Black parents, trying to break out of enforced segregation and give their children a fair education, were bussed into white neighborhood schools.

When police and soldiers must escort children on every bus, and furious stone-throwing whites must be held back by barricades to protect black children, we teach them on their first day in the white world that the Ku Klux Klan lives in the white heart—as I mistakenly wrote back then. In my later work with the KKK, I learned a cruel irony: the children of Klansmen are often the only whites in all-Black schools because they're too poor to flee.

"Black schools" is the phrase many Danish parents now use for schools with mostly brown immigrant children—and the ones they themselves flee. This is the same generation that, as self-righteous youths in the '70s, condemned American racism while watching my slideshow.

1974 - San Francisco

1971 - East St Louis, IL

1989 - Harlem, NY

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

How Schools Teach Black Children to Blame Themselves and Accept Their Oppression

"The education system in this country - especially for poor, black people - is not designed for you to succeed. It's not designed for you to question anything. It's not designed for you to challenge the system. It's designed to keep you in line." - Angie Thomas, The Hate U Give

These are black schoolchildren in an American ghetto recorded on tape, but the conversation could just as easily have been recorded today among brown ghetto children in Europe:

- We should be friends to white people, like Mary. She's my friend and she's white.
- Wait until you grow up and she'll be out of this world!
- How do you know she'll be out of this world?
- She won't be out of the world, but out of this country.
- Out of this country or out of this ghetto?
- Out of this country, ghetto, or anything ...
- She will still be my friend.
- She might turn against you. They might brainwash her.
- A white person is still a human being!
- But why ... how come they treat a black person as if he an animal?
- We must've done something wrong!

When children are constantly told they don't belong, it's not surprising that many ghetto parents oppose integrated schooling, even though they know their own schools fail them. Being deprived in their own neighborhood is easier to bear than the illusion of belonging to a mainstream that also rejects them. Even in integrated schools we crush the spirit of the children we've marginalized.

Above interview with school children - illustrated

Everywhere teachers shape pupils to match the expectations they already have of them. If teachers are told a random group are "potential academic spurters," these children will live up to that expectation thanks to the special treatment the teacher unconsciously devotes to them.

In a master-slave society, the one expected to be the "slave" will thus receive an inferior education—with Black or white teachers, segregation or integration making little difference.

This "innocent" discrimination has disastrous consequences wherever pupils are sorted into "slow" and "bright" tracks, mirroring the class structure outside. A computer error once placed all "slow" children in the "bright" class and vice versa. A year later, the slow acted bright and the bright acted slow—the beginning of ghettoization. I often met teachers and principals referring to their ghetto pupils as "animals," to the point where I saw even young children thinking of themselves as rats.

I learned this personally in my Danish school. Speaking a rural dialect that sounded "dumb" and "inarticulate" to teachers in the city, where they spoke "correct" Danish.

As a result, they unconsciously avoided me, and slowly I became introverted, with occasional explosions of "dumb" behavior. I lost the desire to learn, and scored far below the others until I finally dropped out, and eventually became a streetwise vagabond.

Had I, in addition to my ADHD, been Black or brown in a racist society where we unconsciously try to keep such "unteachables" out of sight till they become "behavioral untouchables," I could easily have ended up not only streetwise but also the "criminal," "addict," "prostitute," or "welfare loafer" that society expects its disposable people to become.

1974 - Washington, NC

Breaking the Stereotypes: Empowering Black and Minority Children Through Education

"Culturally relevant pedagogy aims not just to impart knowledge, but to empower students to challenge the status quo and to question societal norms." - Gloria Ladson-Billings, from "The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children"

Teachers often avoid being seen as enforcers of a master–slave society by shifting the blame onto their pupils. Liberals insist that a ghetto child's "lack of motivation" and "impaired learning ability" comes from being "culturally deprived" because their homes lack books beyond the Bible or Qur'an.

But perhaps teachers themselves are trapped in the same closed system and have become its most effective agents, repeating lines such as "Our schools aren't bad—we get bad students" or the condescending "Poor little things," which crushes young spirits.

If there's any doubt left, Black Panther and Black Muslim schools showed what happens when highly motivated, committed teachers truly believe in their students: their ghetto children rose to national (white) standards. So do private Muslim schools in Denmark.

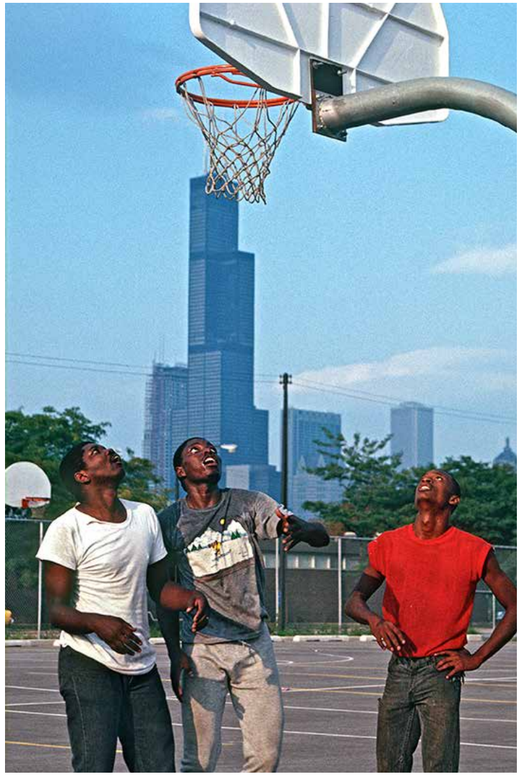
The same pattern appears wherever oppressed groups are shielded from society's destructive expectations—such as girls' schools, whose graduates often outperform women from integrated schools shaped by society's sexism. If we find it difficult to face our own racism, let's not forget how few men 50 years ago saw themselves as sexists. But school records from those earlier decades reveal how many women we crushed with our attitudes and "forced" away from higher education with emotional blocks that prevented them from becoming doctors, lawyers, and scientists.

The same "4th grade syndrome"—when marginalized children in the US and Europe begin falling behind—forces a painful conclusion:

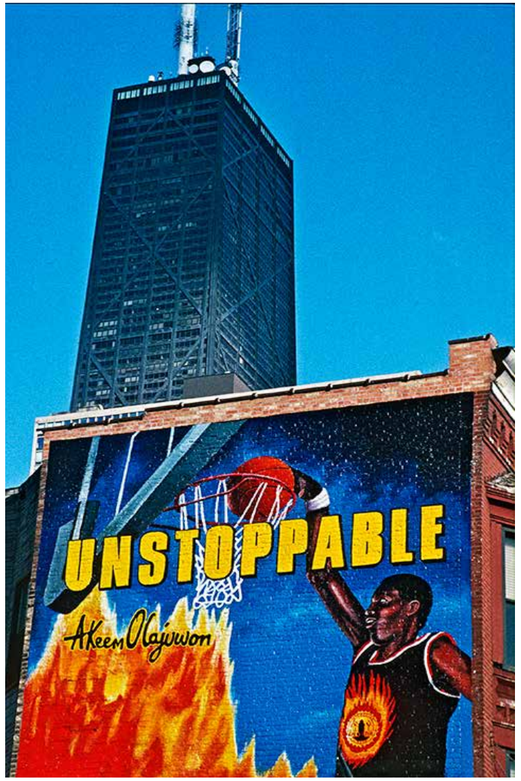
Either we confront our own racism, or children of color must be protected from us in schools with deeply committed and conscientious teachers, "saving angels" who can rebuild the self-worth we steal from them.

I'm not exempt. After months of teaching at mostly white universities, I unconsciously absorb my students' thinking. I catch myself slipping into racist thinking about "blacks"— at least until I decide it is time for de-brainwashing by moving back with my black friends in the ghettos. When I'm similarly isolated in Denmark, my thinking about those whom Danes label "Muslims" becomes skewed in the same way with the racist's reproachful and distancing perspective.

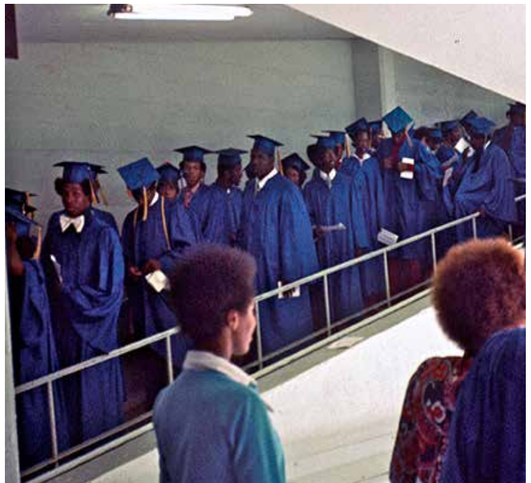
In the blindness of my white privilege I begin to think like those who cherish invisible hierarchies. For blindness it is when we outwardly demand integration, but in our inner thinking "distance ourselves from," fear, and consequently crush those we claim to welcome.



1990 - Chicago

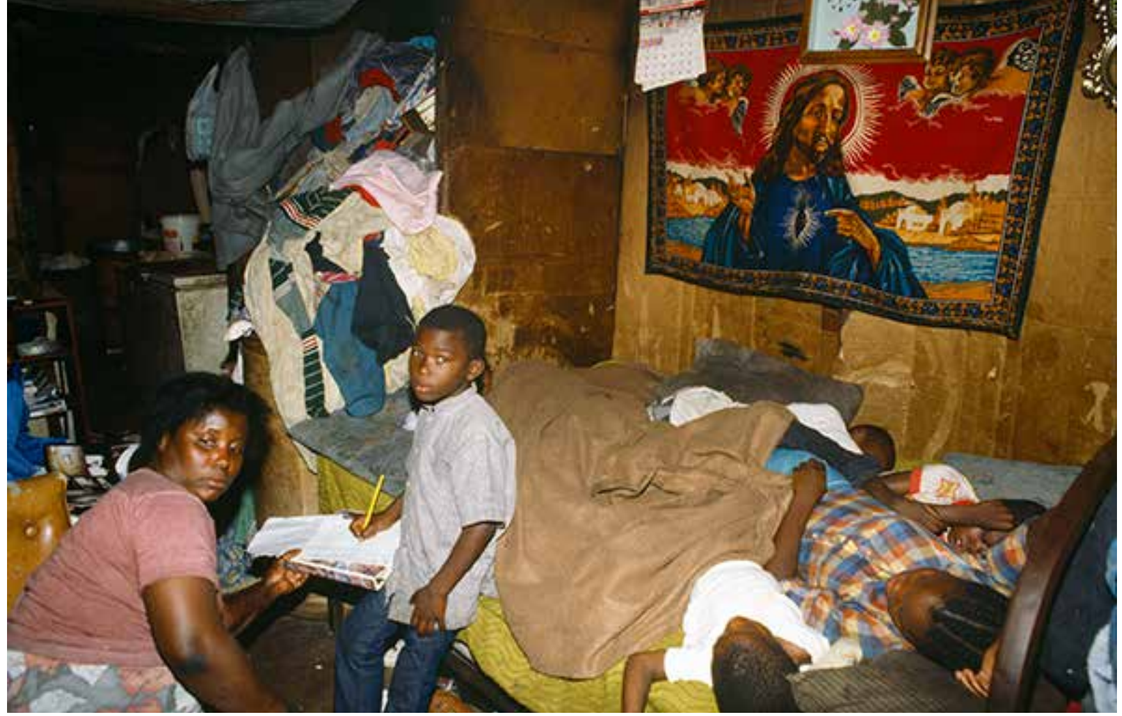


1990 - Chicago



1989 - NYC

Opposite page left
1974 - Greensboro, NC
and right 1972 - Detroit



1990 - Burke County, GA

2009 - From high school prom in Natchez, MS

Bridging Divides: Racial Solidarity or the Persistence of Apartheid

"Education is no equalizer—rather, it is the sleep that precedes the American Dream. So wake up—wake up! Lift your voices until you've patched every hole in a child's broken sky." —Amanda Gorman, The Hill We Climb

In Los Angeles I saw a remarkable case of racial solidarity when West Indian immigrant students formed an organization to motivate native blacks not to drop out of high school and college—a kind of modern underground railroad, where free blacks once helped people escape slavery.

Whites who develop racist notions of black ability when they see blacks falling behind—for decades, in both segregated and integrated schools—forget that this reflects the oppressive mindset internalized by blacks generation after generation.

Many black parents, whose own self-esteem has been eroded by a white-majority society, struggle to instill the confidence necessary for their children to succeed.

West Indian blacks, raised in black-majority societies, overcome this thinking more easily. In Ivy League universities, up to 85% of my black students told me they were of West Indian descent, had one West Indian parent, or had been adopted by whites.

This oppression shapes everyone. In this photograph of black teenagers, the girl was adopted by a ghetto family and raised to "be black": to think, dress, and behave within the ghetto's norms. She has little in common with whites; she can't even speak "our language."

And in white homes I see the opposite pattern. Black and white, Palestinian and Jew, native and immigrant, male and female—all are injured when parents recreate the patterns of oppression they themselves inherited. Both sides eventually lose the desire or ability to treat the other humanely.

1973 - Baltimore

We give up, deciding it's absurd ethnic alchemy to mix elements that repel each other like oil and water. Liberal efforts to shake these elements together are short-lived attempts to give oppression a human face—like voting for Obama while trapped in the massive apartheid of the heart Obama describes in The Courage to Hope.

And with affirmative action overturned, the conservative Supreme Court has abandoned even the pretense of helping black Americans reach the educational levels they would naturally achieve in a society free of our long history of oppression.
So is there any hope?

1973 - Indianapolis, IN

Love's guilt of sin and Caste instinct

"Caste is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things." - Isabel Wilkerson

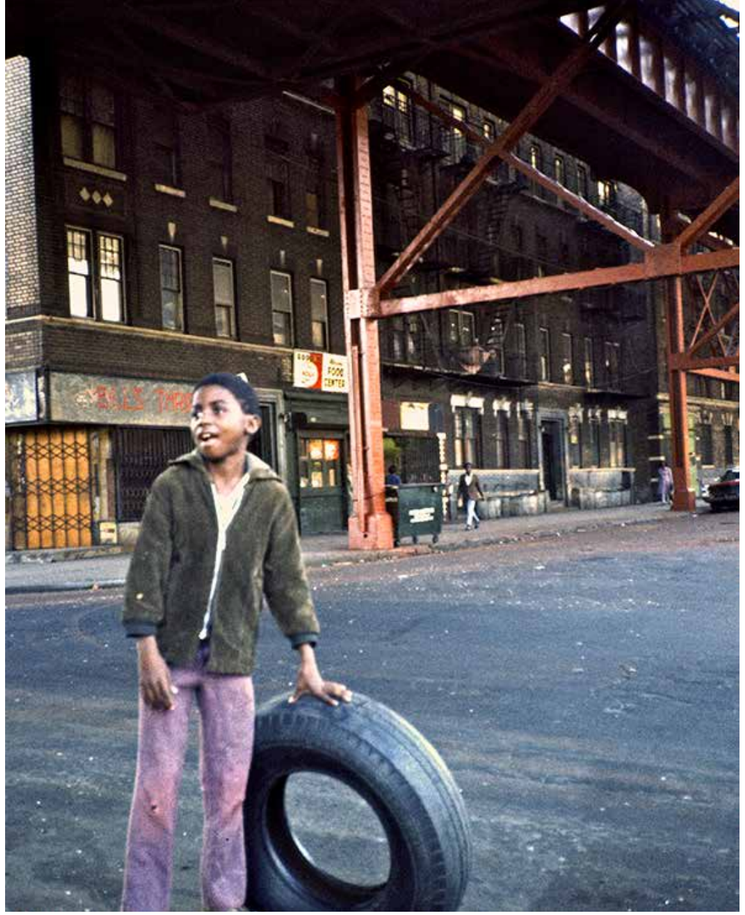
Yes, I often hear even the worst racists say, "I wish we could adopt all Black children so they could become like us." Though they search for fault in minority culture, this is not hatred so much as the same instinct Europeans display when Muslims convert to Christianity: relief at sameness instead of discomfort of their brown ethnicism.

I see this awkward hope most clearly among white university students. Out of liberal guilt they try to reach out toward Black peers, while reactionary guilt—rooted in childhood warnings by their parent's click of car locks when they drove too close to Black neighborhoods—pulls them back.

It's frightening to betray their parents' love, so when they try to reach out to blacks out of love, they are pulled backward out of love.

Their clumsiness and patronizing triggers the deep anger of Black students, shaped by a parallel but inverted oppression. This revives the white fear—now of being rejected.

Thus, the oppressor and the oppressed constantly "create" each other since in caste systems none of us is free; we both lose the ability to respond freely to each other. The cocktail of white guilt and fear creates the anger and hostility of internalized racism among blacks, which in turn creates more white fear and guilt, etc.



1974 - Brownsville, NY

1975 - San Francisco

1974 - Palm Beach, FL

The worst racism today is often not born of hate but of love—of wanting to protect "our own" from what we were taught to fear.

When I bring white students to Black parties in the U.S. or brown parties in Denmark, I often see them burst into tears of guilt: after years of demonizing others unconsciously, they suddenly experience them as human.
Our tears reveal how deeply caste thinking has shaped us all.

"For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it." - Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb"

1982 - San Francisco

Intersecting Oppressions: Our Dual Fight Against Racism and Homophobia

"Black homophobia is a weapon wielded against Black people, a tool of white supremacy designed to keep us divided and powerless. It's time we recognize it as such and work to dismantle it." - Danez Smith, "Don't Call It Love"

The more I learned about the crippling effects of ostracization, the harder it became to condemn whites for our racism. Even for me—and for African and Caribbean immigrants unshaped by America's dominant culture—it wasn't always possible to respond with humanity to people trapped in pariah cultures.

The awkwardness many whites showed toward Blacks became painfully clear when I compared it to my own difficulty being fully human toward those forced into queer ghettos by my heterosexist upbringing. Thus, I didn't need to meet many self-hating closeted men on the highways to feel a moral obligation to join the first openly gay movement in San Francisco.

Growing up in rural Denmark, my attitude toward gay people had been "liberal," but that simply meant that I thoughtlessly had pushed them underground – without the open hatred in other countries such as Saudi Arabia.
In San Francisco I quickly learned from radical activists that liberals often blocked liberation more effectively than bigots. Our sense of heterosexual superiority remained intact behind condescending phrases like "we must accept homosexuals," where the "we" always excluded the very people we claimed to support.

Much has changed since then, but in many countries LGBTQ people still face not just hatred and bigotry, but the suffocating "tolerance" that marks them as regrettable rather than normal. For centuries, gay men and lesbians were unable to kiss and hold hands in public; laws taught them to see their own sexuality as shameful long before adulthood; leading them to internalize heterosexist definitions of good and bad; pushing them, especially in youth, into futile attempts to "straighten out" their lives.

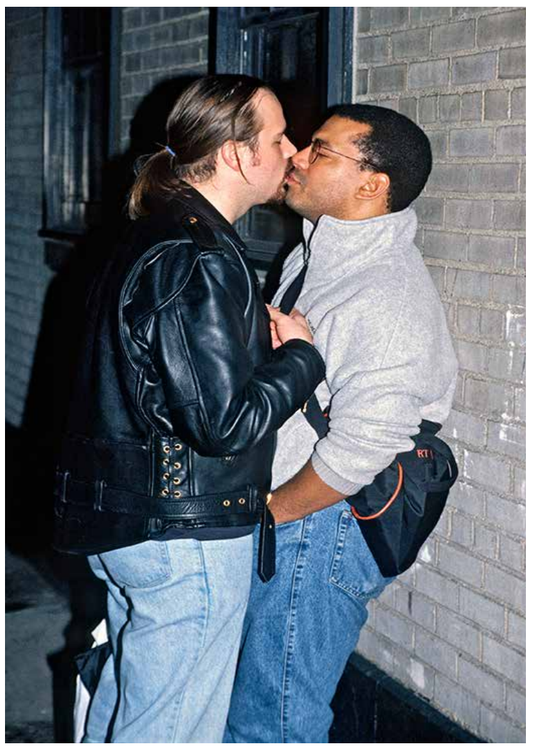
The resulting self-hatred was just as devastating as when Blacks straightened their hair to "pass." Eventually, LGBTQ people too were pushed into segregated queer ghettos, with their own riots and subcultures.

My early advocacy was noticed. Black gay men such as San Francisco Film Festival Albert Johnson and theater director Burial Clay (murdered a week after setting up my show) were the first to invite American Pictures to the U.S.

When I lived with Lawrence Andrews, a Black gay activist who helped establish the American Pictures Theater in San Francisco, he asked me to run workshops for his group, Black and White Men Together, to confront racism among its members. "The whites can sleep with us," he said, "but afterward they want nothing to do with us."

The divide between gay men and lesbians was even wider then, but in the 1980s I saw lesbians move beyond their justified anger at men to join the broader struggle.

1989 - Washington, DC



1992 - NYC

1984 - Swarthmore, PA

2012 - Washington, DC

1973 - Baltimore. Ms. Willie after our Thanksgiving dinner

2021 - Ms. Willie, now back in her rural NC 73 years old

My Cross-cultural Cross Paths to the World of Cross-dressing

1973 - Baltimore. Ms. Willie in her living room

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

"Black queer youth are not a monolith, and our experiences are diverse. But we all deserve to be seen, heard, and loved for who we are." —Kacen Callender, from Felix Ever After

Hitchhiking with my Danish sign in Baltimore's ghetto on Thanksgiving 1973, hoping for a place to stay, I was astonished to be picked up by a beautiful Black woman — Black women almost never picked me up. She invited me to her immaculate suburban home, and after a long talk about Danish literature, she asked me to share her silk bed. Only when we began kissing did her beard stubble reveal she was a trans woman.
When I later told this story to American men, they reacted with disgust: "Did you jump out the window?" In fact, not long after, two men killed a trans woman they believed was a cis sex worker. For me, Ms. Willie became a dear friend who opened the door to the trans and drag world. She admired Denmark for its early gender-affirming surgeries and told me of Christine Jorgensen's book.

Growing up in the tobacco fields of North Carolina, she'd felt drawn to girls' clothes from age five and later fled north to live openly as her true self. Today, now in her seventies, she has even returned to North Carolina.

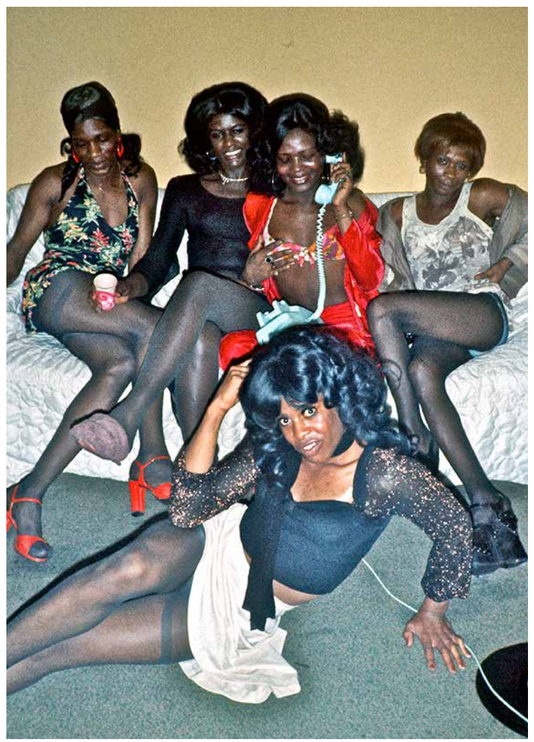
After Willie's loving introduction to the trans and drag world, I felt immediately at home when I later lived among many trans people in San Francisco's Tenderloin. Seeing their struggles during transition only deepened my appreciation for their joyous parties and drag competitions.

So when, in old age, I helped open Denmark's first women's mosque, I did so on the condition that our many LGBTQ refugees could wear high heels in the mosque during their drag shows.

"It takes courage to love what you fear." — James Baldwin, from Giovanni's Room

1995 - NYC - a men's restroom, before Trump's anti-woke MAGA movement

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1975 - Tenderloin, SF. - Transsexual party

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

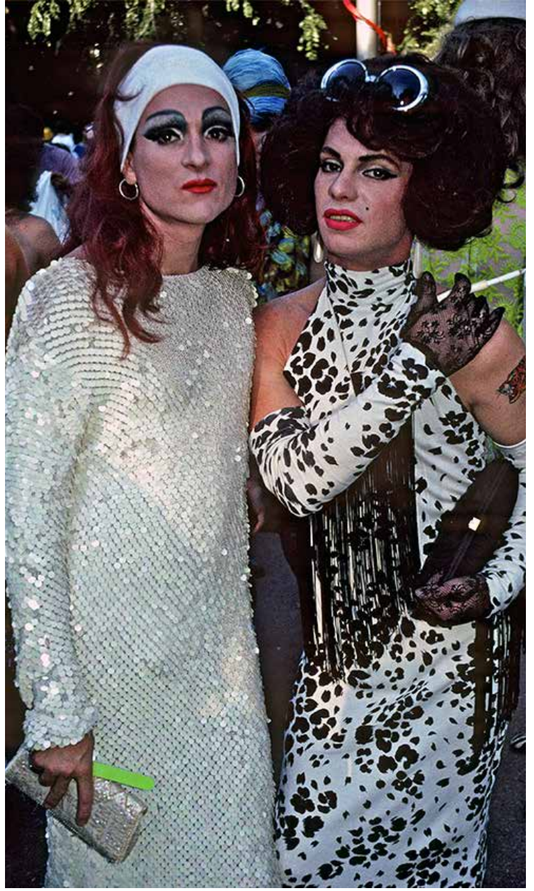
The Ghetto of the Ghetto: How Society Marginalizes and Stigmatizes Trans People

1975 - SF. Transgender father's birthday for her son

"To be black and queer is to be in a state of constant negotiation between the world inside and the world outside." - Essex Hemphill

Liberation was never easy. Early on I saw how systemic contempt pushed many trans people into drugs and sex work, mirroring the destructive patterns produced by Black oppression. So, most of those friends I later lost touch with. When society treats a minority with hostility, people inside that closed system often become hyperconscious of their "difference" and may even exaggerate it. And so the vicious circle tightens: the more the subculture asserts itself, the more it seems—falsely—to "justify" society's contempt. A ghetto within the ghetto forms, as even mainstream gays and lesbians sometimes blame drag performers, trans people, and other queer subcultures for making gay acceptance with the straight world "harder."

That same transphobia—weaponized and amplified—became one of the forces mobilized in Trump's 2024 election victory.



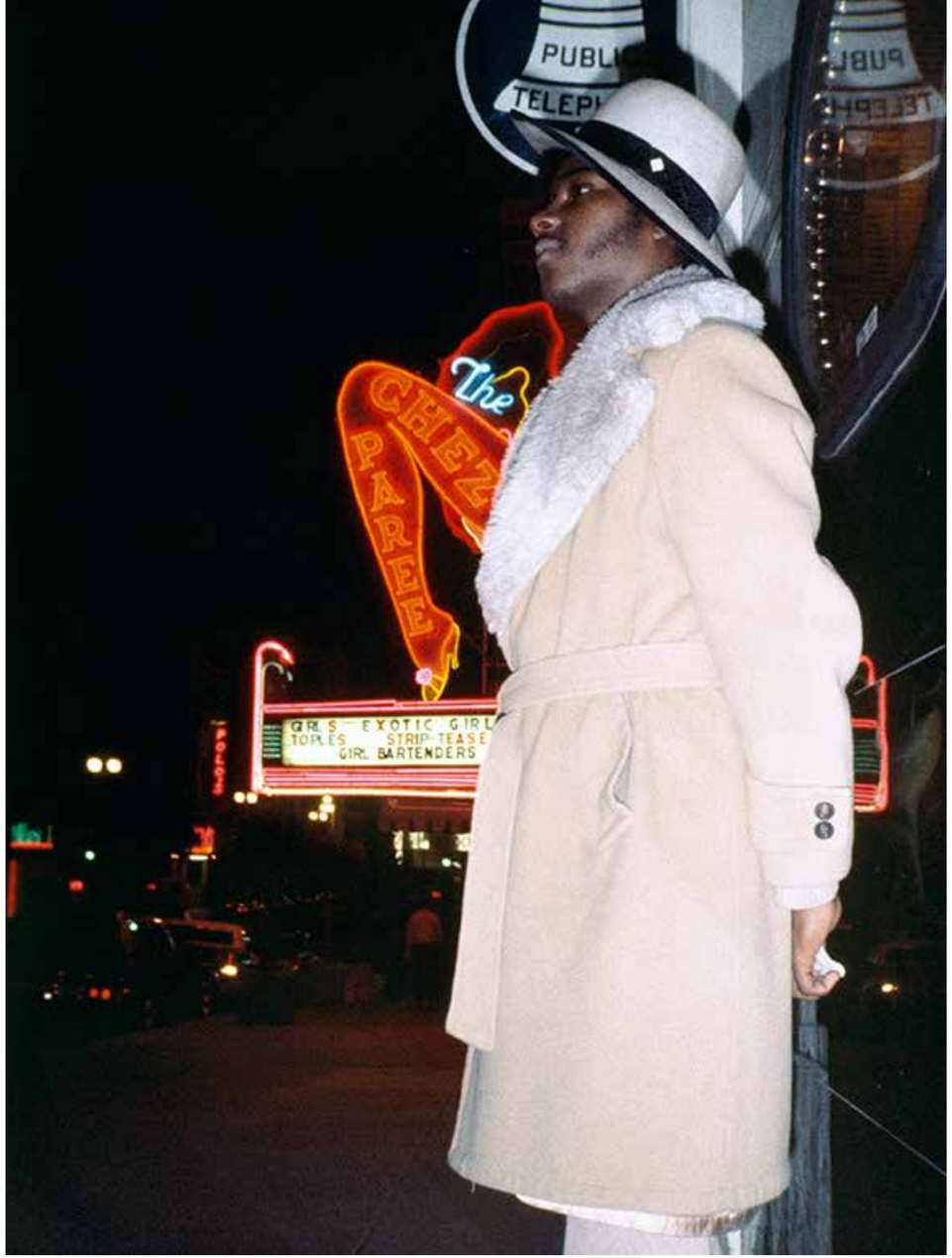
2001 - NYC

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

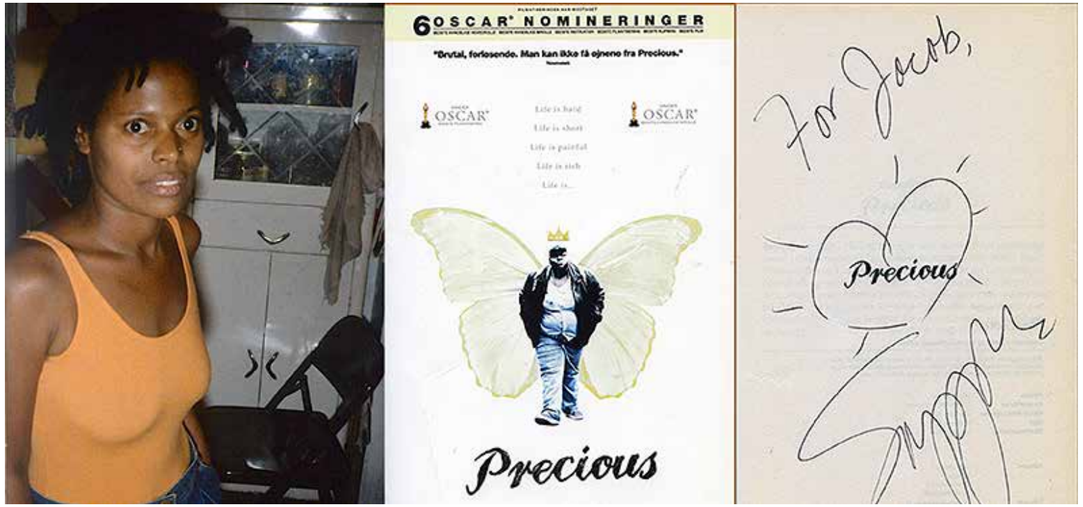
1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

Muligvis sort baggrund



1985 - Sapphire Lofton in her apartment in Harlem while working on the book - 2010 - The film and book with Sapphire's inscription to me

How Incest and Sexual Abuse of Children Perpetuate the Cycle of Oppression and Violence

2012 - Sapphire at a dinner with me in New York

2016 - Working with incest survivors in Denmark

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." — Zora Neale Hurston, from Their Eyes Were Watching God

"One of the things my work has taught me is that trauma is not just an individual experience. It is generational, it is communal, it is national." -Sapphire, author of Push (Precious)

As a vagabond, I was often invited home by women who confided their fear of sexually aggressive American men.

Many of them later came out as lesbians, and by the 1980s lesbians were the second-largest minority (after Jews) to organize my campus lectures.

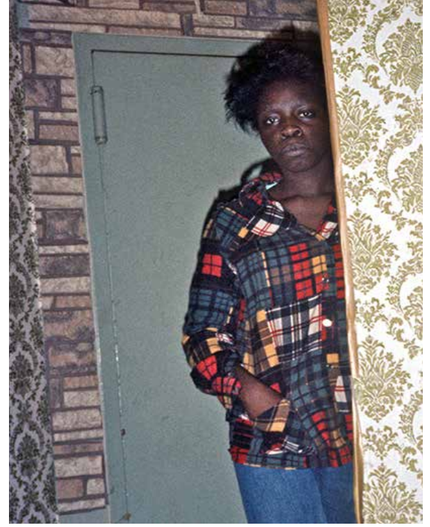
One lesbian, Sapphire—already a known feminist slam poet and activist in United Lesbians of Color for Change—became a close friend. We became so captivated by each other's ideas that I often stayed with her in Harlem between lectures.

What united us was our shared outsider perspective on oppression, especially how childhood sexual abuse becomes a driving engine behind trauma.

I told her about the incest survivors opening up in my workshops; she shared her observations from the Black community. So I was not surprised when she became world famous with her novel Push and the Oscar-winning film Precious.

In Denmark I proudly introduced the movie in cinemas with a slideshow about "my life with Sapphire." She later came to Denmark to support transformation workshops for incest survivors at my Ubuntu House.

1973 - Sally in Queens, NY



2006 - Sally in Bronx, NY

"Trauma isn't a black box, it's a constellation. It's a network of experiences that shape our desires, our fears, and our actions."
- Kiese Laymon, sexual-abuse survivor

"I know that I can never go back to my childhood, but in its absence, I have learned to live with the ghosts that haunt me." -Sexual abuse survivor Maya Angelou

The need for help is overwhelming. Globally, 19.7% of girls and 9.7% of boys have been sexually abused. In the U.S., it's 25% and 16% — 42 million adult incest survivors. Rates are even higher among Black Americans, the poor, and children in single-parent households facing systemic disadvantage.

Much of the violence around us — white hate terror, Black crime, explosive rage — has its roots in this unspoken trauma.

Had I not remained in touch with so many people who invited me into their lives as a vagabond/outsider, I would never have understood how often those invitations had been silent cries for help, often expressed through irrational, self-destructive, or violent behavior.
I may have felt their pain then, but I could not articulate it until the survivors themselves began speaking out.

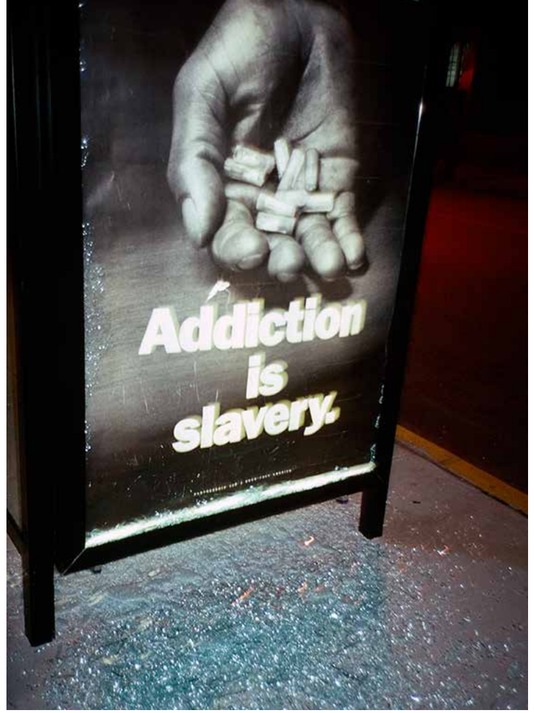
Often women, like the overweight Precious, spoke of numbing their pain through alcohol, drugs, or compulsory overeating. One man in West Virginia sent me $5,000 after suing his abuser: "Use this to support your healing workshops," he said. I never cashed it.

Among my ghetto friends I saw over the years how sexual abuse shattered children in different ways within the same family. I often wondered why Sally — 18 years old in 1973 (on page 324) when her mother always turned a blind eye — stopped coming to family events in the '80s and '90s.

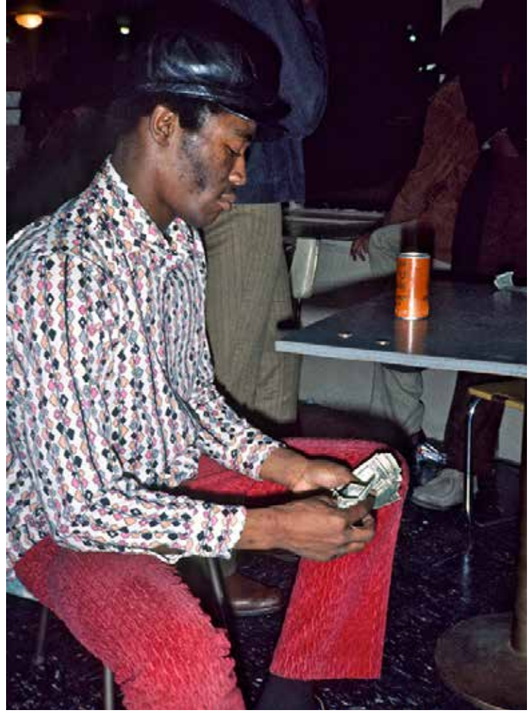
1986- Kashia as a crack addict in Queens, NY

2015- See Cory talk about the incest in the TV-movie with her below

Interview with Cory about the incest she was exposed to by her father.



1991 - NYC



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

Facing Ourselves in the Mirror of Ghetto Subcultures

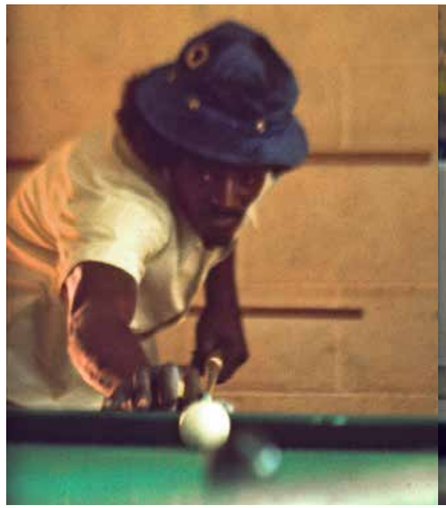
"Understanding the subculture of the ghetto requires seeing beyond stereotypes to the real people struggling every day not just to survive, but to retain their humanity in the face of systemic oppression." bell hooks

The strong subculture in the lower ghetto is a thorn in the side of better-off Blacks. Both groups strive to appear "deserving" of inclusion, yet white society makes that struggle harder by reducing them to pathologized stereotypes of ghetto life.

Aware of this, the Black middle class often views the lower ghetto not as evidence of shared oppression but as an embarrassment to be distanced from.

The tensions between these two ghettos were so sharp that I often had to choose sides. That choice became easy after witnessing both the suffering in the lower ghetto and the contempt directed at it—from the upper ghetto as well as from whites.

The more I understood the lower ghetto, the more clearly I saw the deeper mechanics of oppression. For many whites, this world is an incomprehensible landscape of hustlers, pimps, gangs, traffickers, sex workers, and people struggling with addiction. In a closed system like this, acts of defiance and survival can look like contempt for the society that has already doomed them as outsiders.



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1973 - Greensboro, NC

Pool halls become meeting places, luxury cars become armor and status, Black or Brown nationalism—sometimes even Islamism—becomes community and identity. The brotherly handshake and the sharp "jive" or "walla" talk are their code.

And while "backstabbing" may be as common as brotherhood, once you learn their rules and the hard techniques of survival, you can't help but feel drawn to these social outcasts— since finding humanity here often is more overwhelming than among people sheltered from life's wounds.

What unsettles us about this underworld is that it throws back at us a wildly exaggerated mirror image of our own society. Without understanding—and respecting—this frightening culture, we cannot confront the oppressive and violent impulses embedded in ourselves, which these images reflect so starkly.

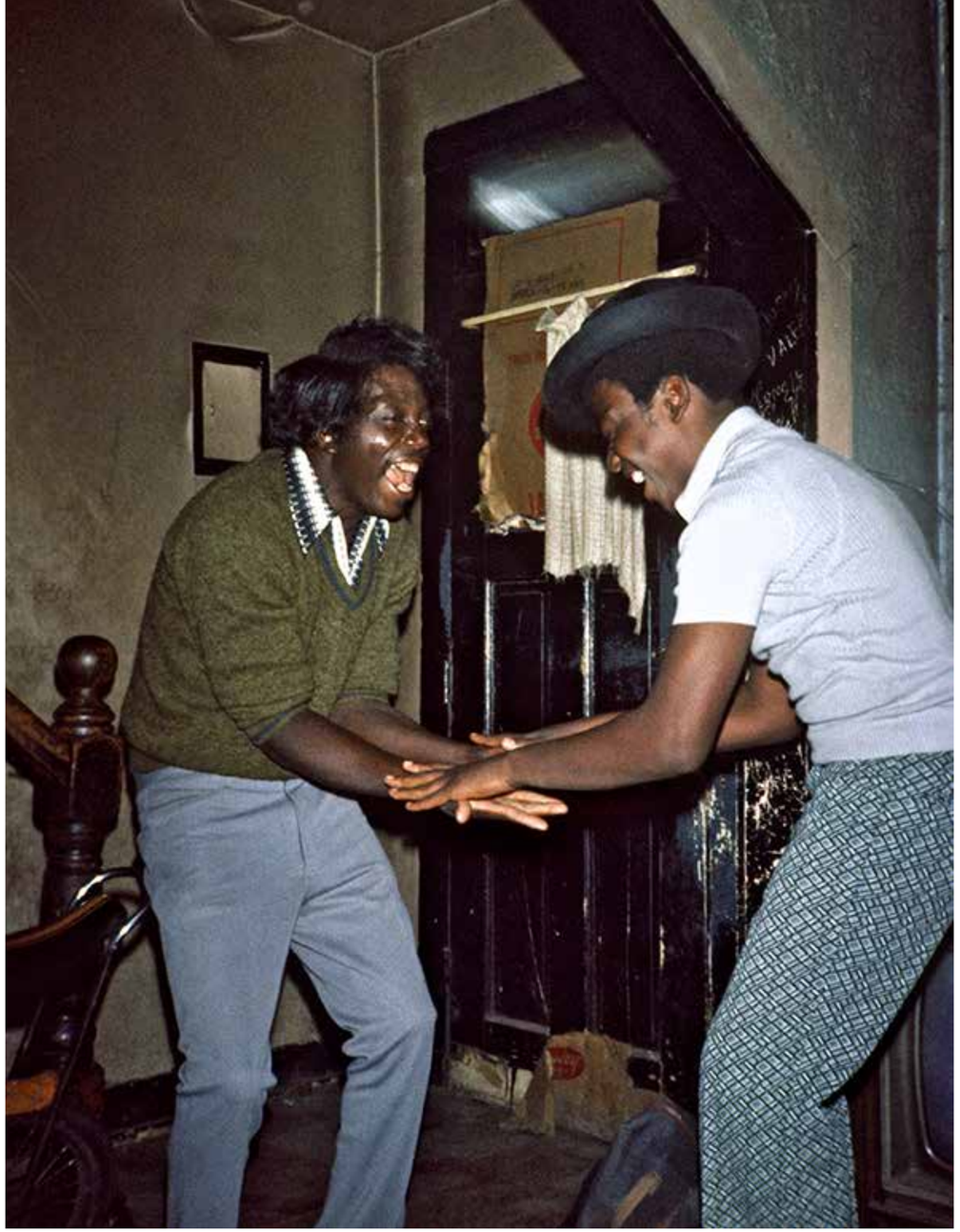
For they do not show a "black" or "brown" culture, but rather our own state of mind in all its present brutality.

Here, stripped to its bare bones, are the tendencies of the entire system: the relentless race for status, the competitive obsession, the sexism—and, not least, the master-slave dynamic woven into every social hierarchy.

1974 - Daytona Beach, FL

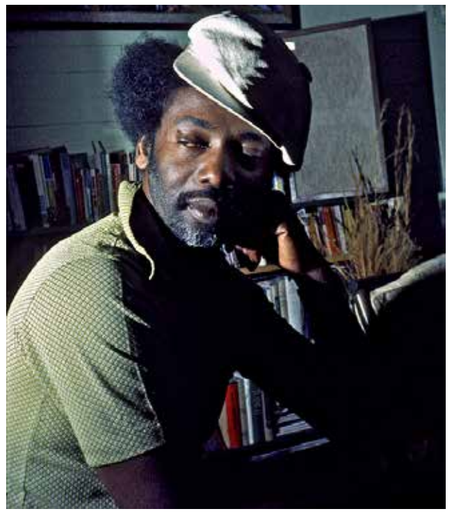
1972 - Detroit

1972 - Jackson, MI with picture of J. F. Kennedy

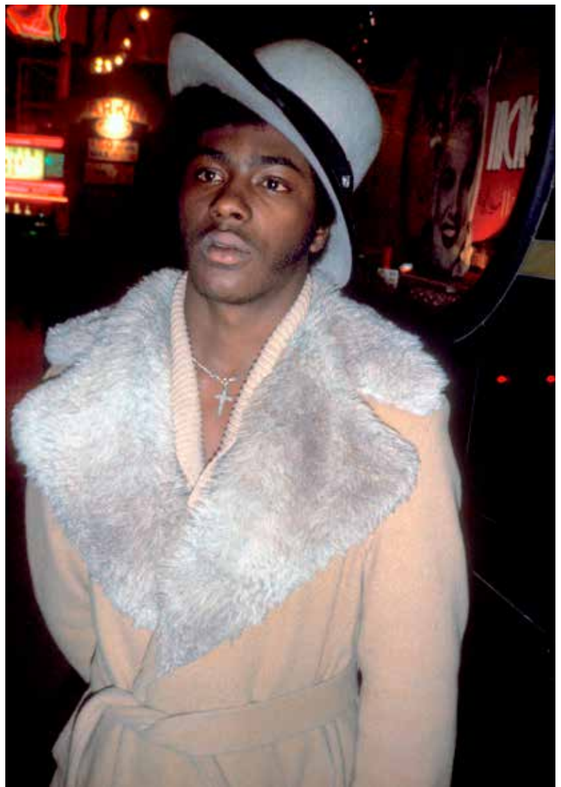


1975 - Richmond, VA

Muligvis sort baggrund



1973 - Zebulon, NC - Below both 1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1974 - NYC

The unseen chains of exploitation and dependency in the ghetto

"Sexism has never rendered women powerless. It has either suppressed their strength or exploited it."—Sapphire

"Many women who are trapped in exploitative situations have internalized the belief that they deserve to be treated badly. This is a form of self-hatred that is nurtured by a society that devalues and degrades women." — bell hooks

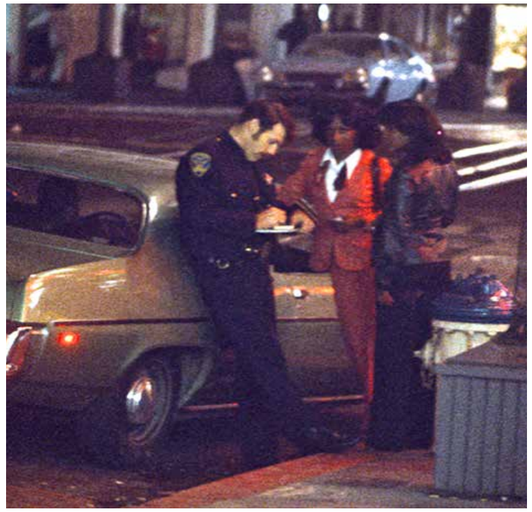
Wherever a master–slave relationship exists, it reproduces itself within the oppressed group as new hierarchies and new forms of domination. Wherever this dynamic appears, freedom is already absent; such systems can survive only inside a closed system. In the underclass, this internalized slavery appears starkly in the relationship between pimp and sex worker. The Black woman under pimp control is expected to submit completely, shrinking before him in ritualized deference.
Yet the pimp is not only the executioner of this system; he is also its casualty. Within the larger hierarchy, he becomes a miniature slave driver, delivering "merchandise" upward into the white-dominated economy. His tool is no longer the plantation whip but the "pimp stick," twisted from coat hangers. And while pimps—like businessmen in mainstream society—may act with chilling cruelty, it matters to remember that they too operate under rigid rules not of their own making.

Those rules are laid down in The Book—an unwritten Adam Smith of the streets, an underground business manual passed from pimp to pimp. Research has since confirmed that these codes still exist: quotas, hours, punishments, financial controls, and an entire language of dominance. The Book describes a sub-system within the larger economic machine—an extension, grotesquely distorted, of capitalist logic.

And woe to the pimp who violates its laws. Like corporate executives, they hold daily "meetings," exchanging strategies for controlling their "ho's" and keeping earnings high. Working hours—"git down-time"—follow assembly-line precision. You can tell a seasoned "mack-man" by the way his women hit the street simultaneously, while the "outlaws" drift in and out on their own terms.
Because sex workers are the ultimate casualties in this hierarchy of exploitation, I felt a deep closeness to them—especially the outlaws who offered me hospitality. I was one of the few men in their lives with whom the relationship was neither sexual nor transactional, and in that space they could still reveal a humanity the system had failed to destroy.

Both from 1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1996 - Astoria, NY

"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are invisible to me." —Audre Lorde

"Black women's bodies are battlegrounds, the site where racial, gender, and sexual violence converge." —Kimberlé Crenshaw

"To be oppressed means to be deprived of your ability to choose." – bell hooks

The hustle of gender dynamics in the ghetto and higher up

One reason we connected so easily was that these women—outlaws in their world—had learned every detail of the lower ghetto's system to stay free of pimps. And I, a more privileged outlaw wandering the larger society, had learned the same system simply to survive. We arrived at a shared perspective from opposite directions. The parallels between the social superstructure and the street-level substructure were obvious to them, revealing how racism and sexism intertwined in their double oppression.

The relationship between pimp and sex worker is, in many ways, an exaggerated version of gender relations in the lower ghetto—and even in society at large. One of the man's many "hustles" is extracting "broad money" from women in return for protection from predatory men.

In such a world, a woman may view a man primarily as a source of money or status, often openly expressing a desire to "marry a rich man."

This rapid form of ghetto escape shocked me, since I had rarely seen such transactional expectations among Danish women—perhaps because in a more egalitarian welfare state, economic exploitation between the sexes has less room to grow. Yet the commodification inherent in buying women through wealth or prestige thrives in America's upper and lower classes.

Within this closed system, the underclass has been taught to admire "sharp pimps" and "righteous hustlers in fine threads" just as mainstream society celebrates its maverick capitalists. These flamboyant figures become dangerous role models for ghetto children, drawing them toward the street economy at eight or nine years old. But, like the nouveau riche capitalist, the pimp is a tragic figure—always scheming, always on guard, unable to relax for fear his fragile empire will collapse.

I saw these dynamics clearly during the year I worked with a church that tried to organize sex workers into a union to protect them from brutal police raids and from the pimps who claimed ownership of their lives.

1987 - Harlem, NY

Remember QR-update on Martha to the right

1973 - Greensboro, NC - Geegurtha in the office of Drug Action Council

1973 - With Geegurtha in Greensboro, NC

2003 - With Geegurtha in Atlanta

Geegurtha's struggle from slavery to liberation

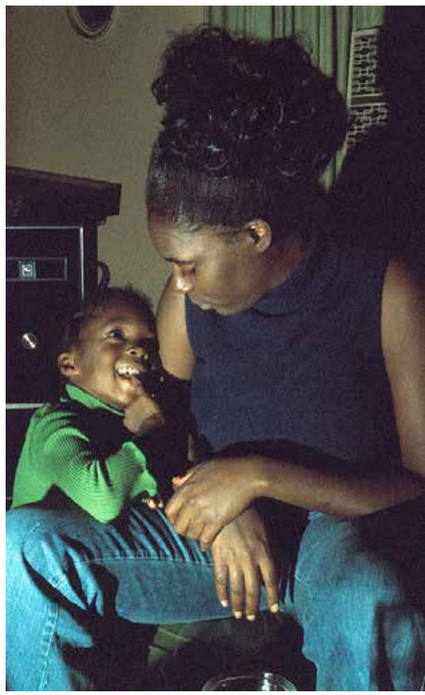
"The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion." - Albert Camus

Among the sex workers who left the deepest mark on me was Geegurtha, fighting her way out of a life that had nearly destroyed her. When I first met her, she had just come out of prison—ravaged by drugs, violence, and years of exploitation. Her daughter was born an addict but saved through transfusions. During the five years Gee worked the streets, she never saw little Natasha.

Yet through sheer determination she "upabilitated" herself. The motherly love she gave afterward— captured in the photo here—still moves me when I recall the shattered woman she once was.
She eventually became manager of the clinic that helped her, went to college, and earned a psychology degree.

I met her when Tony Harris, a social worker, invited me to speak to hardcore convicts in his drug rehab program. Gee asked me home afterward, saying my analysis of their criminal histories had helped her. She was then living with her deeply religious family, who feared she might relapse. Her sister Georgia, active in a church, asked me to stay a week—and even to share a bed with Gee and Natasha. She believed it would help her sister learn to develop an intimate trust with a man who wanted nothing from her: not sex, not money, not power. Their care—and her own strength—worked. Gee never slipped back.

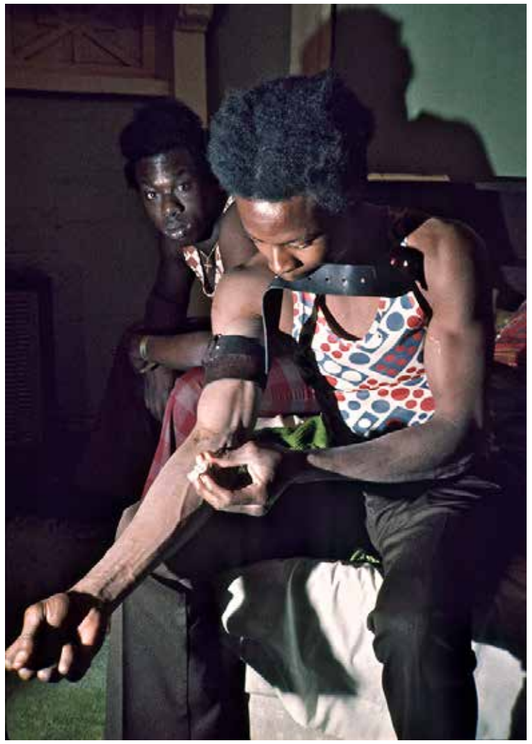
Thirty years later Tony took the picture shown here, posed exactly like Georgia's photo one early Sunday morning before church in 1973.



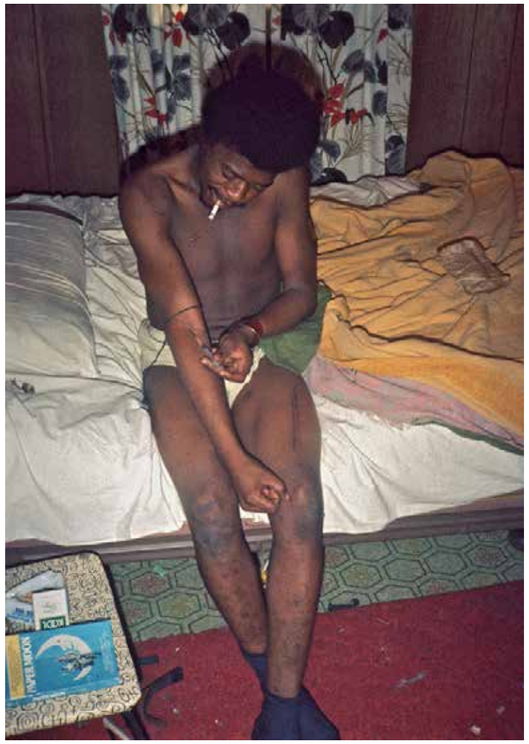
1973 - With daughter Natasha in Greensboro, NC

1973 - Greensboro, NC - Baggie with child

1973 - Greensboro, NC - Baggie's daughters in evening prayer



1974 - Jacksonville, FL



1974 - Daytona Beach, FL

The fight for black motherhood and fatherhood in the closed system

After seeing all the obstacles placed in the way of a Black mother's love, I was deeply moved by Gee's sunshine story. The odds are just as harsh for fatherly love. The man who let me share his bed in a one-room shack in Florida shot up first thing each morning. Unable to break his habit, his family life had collapsed, and he suffered from being barred from seeing his child.

When I lived with Baggie, the mother of the three children, she too had battled addiction but gotten clean and poured everything into giving her kids a loving, religious upbringing. But when I returned a year later, she'd been sentenced to twenty-five years in prison for armed robbery. The American platitude that "the family that prays together stays together" didn't hold up. People we confine to a closed system usually take the fastest way out—often minutes before they might have made it. Many internalize white society's racist expectations so deeply that they lose faith in ever succeeding in ordinary ways.

Most people can understand why a prisoner with seven years left on a sentence risks escape rather than waiting patiently to leave hell legally.
Not until I nearly became ghettoized myself (page 433)— rather than merely living the privileged vagabond life in ghettos — did I truly feel how a closed system functions like a prison: you lack both the psychological surplus and the means to invest in a seven-year education that might free you. Ghetto actions are therefore typically desperate, shaped by the short-term logic of already living in a prison. For people in such conditions, no punishment can ever serve as a real deterrent.

"The war on drugs has been a war on Black and brown communities. It has filled our prisons and jails with people, primarily people of color, for nonviolent drug offenses."
- Michelle Alexander in "The New Jim Crow"

1974 - Jacksonville, FL

1974 - NYC - right after the construction of the WTC, seen in the background.

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco - above and below

1974 - New Orleans

1975 - San Francisco

Below 1974 - New Orleans

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

"Da jeg begyndte at skrive "Blå, blå øjne", var jeg ikke interesseret i modstand mod andres foragt, måder at aflede den på, men de langt mere tragiske og invaliderende konsekvenser af at acceptere afvisning som legitim, som selvindlysende. Jeg vidste, at nogle af ofrene for et stærkt selvhad viser sig at være farlige, voldelige og reproducerer den fjende, der har ydmyget dem igen og igen. " – Toni Morrison

"The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose." - James Baldwin

Toni Morrison in NYC, 2015

Misunderstood Escapes: Challenging Criminal Stereotypes

Criminal escapes—robbery, fraud, or other desperate acts—are no more shortsighted than the more lawful escape attempts whites constantly stereotype Blacks with.

The climate of death and fear destroys trust in the future, and in 1970 it made far more sense to buy a Cadillac than save for years to leave a collapsing shack.

Coming from a welfare state, I found it ironic that contemptuous white Americans derided Blacks for their "low gratification threshold" while their own lives were so consumed by shortsighted tax revolts and heaping BMWs, yachts and endless gadgets over their own threshold. When you refuse to pay for the common good, you invite criminals to your house. A country gets the criminals it produces.

The ghetto criminal directly challenging these inequalities is one of the most misunderstood—and unnecessarily feared—figures in white America.

In reality he poses little danger to whites: over 95% of U.S. crime is intraracial. Adjusted for income, Black crime rates approach white rates—even though many inner-city Black children live with PTSD after surviving, for generations, in war-zone conditions with murder rates higher than American soldiers in Afghanistan or Iraq. Many also suffer from generational trauma from neglect and sexual abuse.

Paradoxically, the more violence I saw in their gangs, the safer I felt under the "ghetto code," the informal rules making violence a currency of respect—where killing someone who "disses" you feels justified.

Burdened by shame after childhood humiliation—and for many, the brutality of prison rape—they liked posing for my camera with weapons that signaled status. Since shame makes you see yourself through the eyes of others, you are ashamed of the way you think society sees you and try to compensate for your feelings of inadequacy.

Seeing them without judgment—as victims with no hope and a desperate need for recognition—made it possible both to survive among them and to imagine solutions. Their self-esteem was so fragile, their actions so impulsive, that I can honestly say I "participated" in several attacks only because my friends never told me about them, nor planned anything beforehand. When they saw a victim, they acted thoughtlessly, driven by a vicious blend of hatred and self-hatred, not necessity. Like colonized children who steal from someone who shows paternal kindness, I found that the adult "rip-offs," "stealers," and "strong-arm studs" acted from Shakespearean motives:

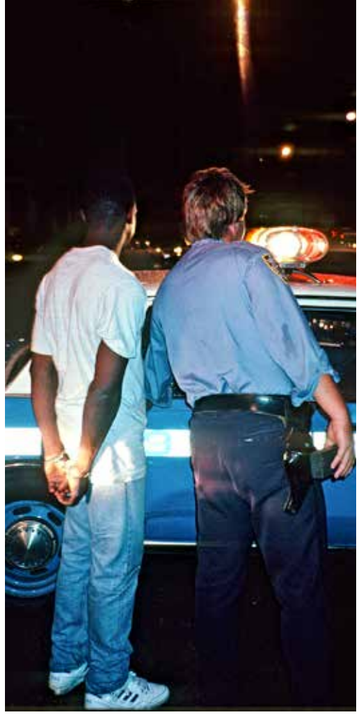
"I am one, my liege, whom the vile blows and buffets of the world have so incensed that I am reckless what I do to spite the world." (Macbeth, Act 3)

1975 - San Francisco

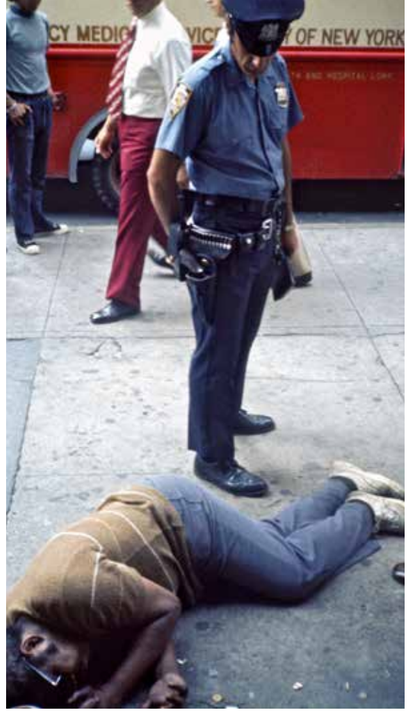
1973 - Baltimore

1974 - Brooklyn, NY

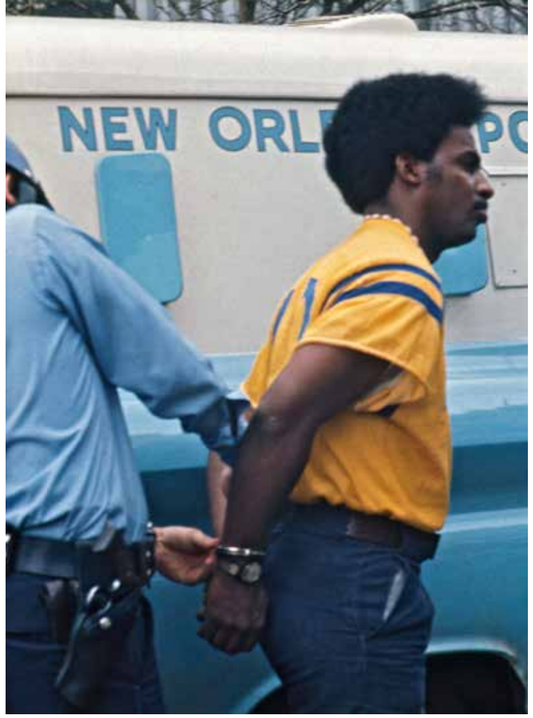
1991 - Bullock County, AL



1975 - San Francisco



1975 - NYC



1973 - New Orleans

1973 - New Orleans

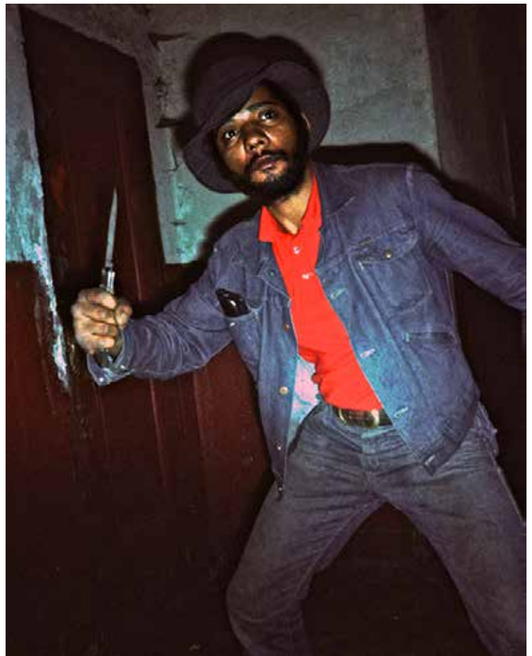
Below 1974 - NYC and 1991 - Memphis, TN

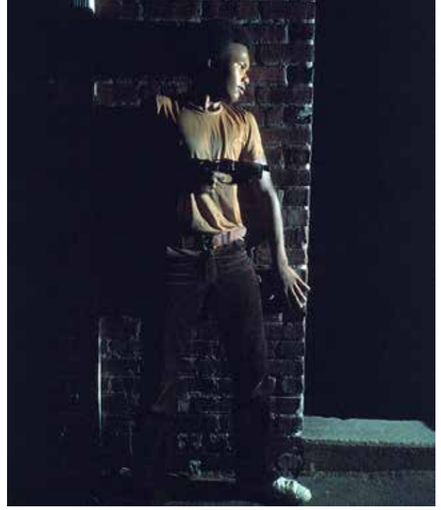
Given their longing for love and nurturing, it is not naïve to believe that working with marginalized criminals—as many committed organizers in the U.S. do—can offer a real alternative to their attempts to find recognition in gangs. Even in gang-ridden Sweden, Nicolas Lunabba's work with Muslim youth in Hela Malmö shows how little it takes to shift violent boys shaped by humiliation. Offering them safety, trust, and the feeling of being seen can pull them out of self-destructive cycles at a fraction of the cost of incarceration. Both they and society benefit.

"Violence is a personal necessity for the oppressed. It is not a strategy consciously devised. It is the deep, instinctive expression of a human being denied individuality."
– Richard Wright in Native Son

1975 - San Francisco

1991 - NYC and below 1975 - NYC





1975 - Richmond, VA (Willie Hurt)

1975 - Malibu, CA

1989 - Harlem, NY

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

Divide and rule in the caste system

"People who treat other people as less than human must not be surprised when the bread they have cast on the waters comes floating back to them, poisoned." - James Baldwin in The fire Next Time

Freddy's dead, that's what I said.
Let the Man rap a plan,
say he would send him home,
but his hope was a rope
and he should have known.
Why can't we brothers protect one another?
No one's serious and it makes me furious.
Everybody misused him,
ripped him off and abused him
another junkie plan, pushing dope for the man ...

When you live long enough in these surroundings, you feel the conspiracy against the ghetto our prisoners are talking about. As is the case with oppressors all over the world, we in the dominant caste express a psychological need to engage in the politics of divide and conquer.

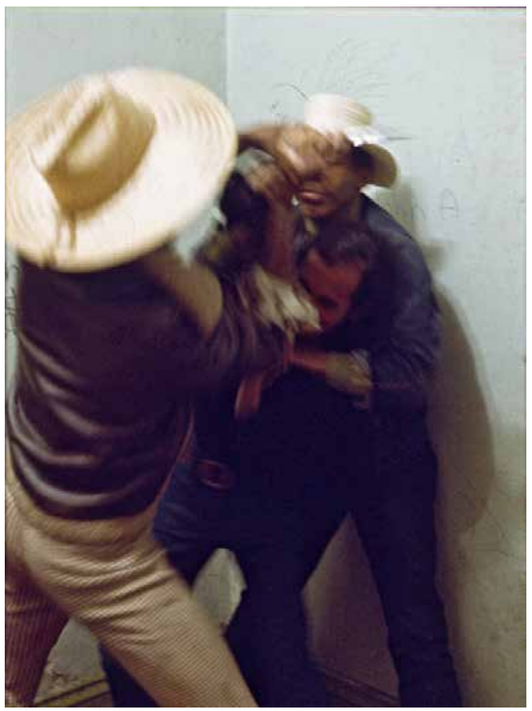
All my life I've heard black American children pick on each other with "you act white" or "you're not really black"—almost the same hateful words I hear today in brown children in Denmark: "you're too Danish," "you're not really a Muslim," "whore" (about girls who dress "too Danish" or just differently than the excluded group). Just as the blacks demean each other with "Oreo" and "coconut," Muslim eighth graders bully each other with "you smell of pork" or "your sister is a Dane fucker." Upper ghetto is pitted against lower ghetto, gang against gang, family against family, even brother against brother.

When I lived with this 15-year-old boy, Willie Hurt, and his mother in Richmond, VA, his 13-year-old brother lay in the hospital, hit by the brother's bullet in a gang fight. The wound left him blind. I followed Willie Hurt on street expeditions two days after the tragedy. Many of these gangs were once destroyed by heroin; the press disclosed that the police had sold heroin and flooded the ghetto with it at a time when some gangs had become politicized. It's again the divide-and-conquer policy being used against a colonized people.

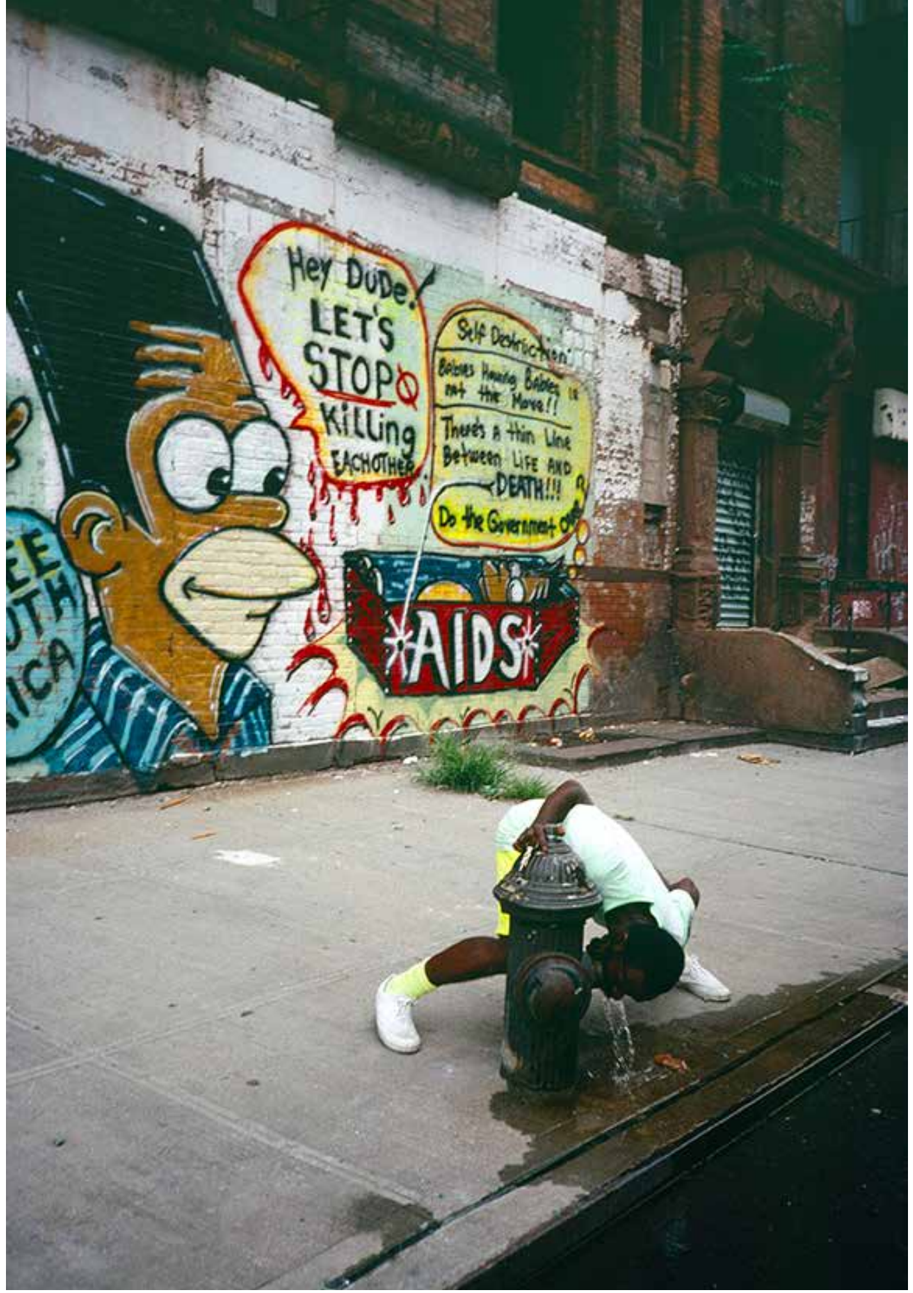
Yet I know whites well enough to believe that, except for a few FBI "Cointelpro" actions, there's no conspiracy against blacks. There's no need for it since our daily "innocent" racism, our daily activities, and master-race vibrations function as effectively as the most well-plotted conspiracy. When I visited the world's richest man, Paul Getty, in his luxurious home, I saw among his favorite motifs an artistic depiction of the oppressed fighting themselves.

Freddy is dead song by Curtis Mayfield - illustrated

1988 - NYC



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1989 - Harlem, NY

1995 - Queens, NY

"And when we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed but when we are silent we are still afraid. So it is better to speak remembering we were never meant to survive." - Audre Lorde's A Litany for Survival

By the early '80s I had counted twenty-two friends who'd been murdered. After that, I lost track. Simon Williams—who had played with my six-year-old son in the Astoria ghetto in 1986—became the fourth person in his family I knew who was killed.

At his funeral in 1995, the minister, part tragedian and part comedian, began with: "We have reached the darkness where we can't cry our pain out any longer. Let's laugh it out." When he started cracking jokes, soon all 150 mourners were roaring, even Simon's sister Catherine, shown here below. But when I returned a few months later to give her my photographs, she too was gone—killed by stray bullets in a grocery store along with several others. Catherine became the fifth murder victim in Lela Taylor's family.

1995 - Queens, NY - Cathrine and husband during funeral

1995 - Queens, NY

Among Eloi and Morlocks

Or Luke 9: 3-5 "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

"The ghetto is a construct, a product of neglect and fear. The people within it are as complex and multifaceted as anywhere else. Their stories deserve to be told, with dignity and without prejudice." - Colson Whitehead

In North Carolina, a millionaire I often stayed with loaned me one of his cars—a big Buick—so I could reach the most remote back roads where hitchhiking was impossible. After seeing much poverty, I reached Wilmington that evening. I'd heard of racial disturbances there and, as always in a new town, began from the bottom by walking into the worst neighborhoods.

I parked far away—you cannot communicate with people if you roll up in a car—grabbed my shoulder bag, and walked as though I'd just hitchhiked into town. I headed for one of the roughest black bars on the main street. I love these dingy bar-and-grills with jars of pickled pigs' feet and peppers, often sitting for hours soaking up the life around me. But that evening things went wrong.

Around eleven o'clock, completely dark, I reached the place. Outside stood the usual half-criminal hustlers. They often look dangerous in their sunglasses, but if you treat them right, they're not so bad. I really love the challenge of finding the human being behind the sunglasses. It's win or lose: the wrong move can mean death.

Like all criminals, they're extremely timid and react spontaneously and nervously. My rule of thumb is that the darker their sunglasses, the more afraid they are—of me and of each other. Yet once trust is gained, and the sunglasses come off over a beer or a joint, they reveal themselves as fantastic people who will do anything for you. That's why I always seek them out first in a new town—they have contacts everywhere.

I'm always completely honest with them, never pretending to be anything other than what I am, never imitating their language or offering the sentimental white "we are brothers" crap they've heard too often. They are deeply paranoid, with little faith in whites, in their own people—or in themselves.

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

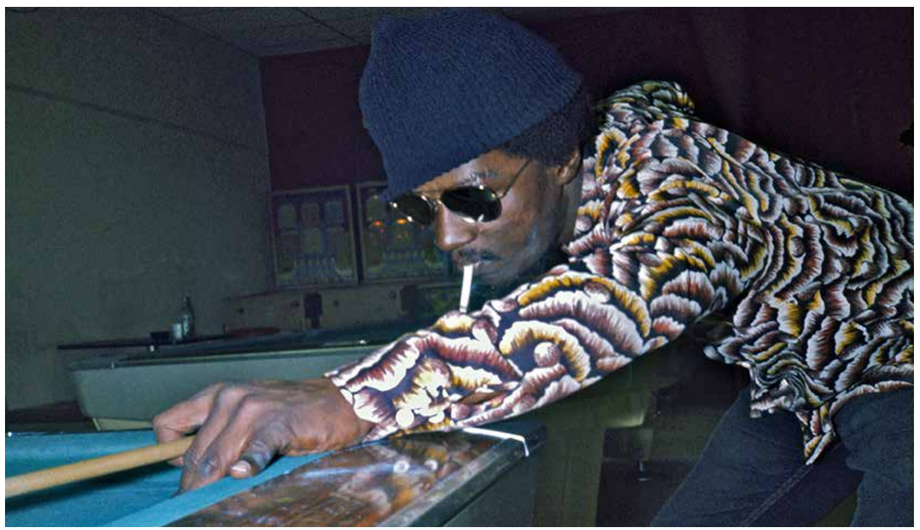
They've been trampled all their lives and such oppression cannot be overcome by phony "brother" talk.

But if you speak absolutely honestly, they begin to see who you are and what you want. They need to know exactly whom they're dealing with. This desire is why many blacks prefer a Southern racist to a Northern liberal: the racist is honest about his hate; the liberal says one thing and does another.

With my pictures and my detailed stories from other ghettos, it's usually not difficult to convince them of my identity (whenever I know it myself). They're never fully convinced I'm not an undercover cop, but almost always take the chance. Every person yearns to be human in this system.

When you let the mask fall, you risk being hurt. Both capitalist and criminal are so deformed by their everyday roles that they have an unspeakable urge toward human kindness—and the vagabond gives them a chance to express it, since he stands completely outside the system.
In order to get something to eat or a place to stay, the vagabond must always talk to the "good" (the humane) in the capitalist or the criminal and when he first realizes that this is always possible, then he can no longer condemn them as "capitalists" or "criminals," but concludes that they all have possibilities for acting in accordance with a system other than the one that usually directs them. Thus, the vagabond instead begins to condemn the system he always has to struggle against in order to survive. (Perhaps out)

Hence even the worst criminals usually take that chance with me. As distrust fades and beers go down, we often fall quite in love with each other through mutual admiration of the roles we play. They always ask what I've learned from other criminals, and the more hustles I describe, the closer we bond. But when exchanging ways to "cop" (anything the criminal needs—heroin, car, gun, woman, or wine), I always try to place it in a political context.
Often the night's events grow increasingly criminal. I know that to get a place to sleep toward morning, I must show I'm with them all the way. So the first night in a new town rarely brings much sleep. But the trust I in this way earn gives me entry to the other circles of the ghetto, since criminals' families and friends are not necessarily criminals themselves.



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

But this night in Wilmington something went wrong. I got the usual hostile vibrations outside the bar, but there was no way to break the ice. Nothing I said got through. Instead, they began making threats: "We're militants—get your ass out of here or you're a dead man."

I was stunned that my survival philosophy failed me; my knees went weak. I suddenly felt I'd lost control and gave up. I walked further down the main street, then turned into an unlit "project" to reach my car from another direction.
But they started after me—these municipal poorhouses was clearly their territory. I made the mistake of running deeper in, trying to hide. Under a bush I watched them spread out—about a dozen of them. Shaking, realizing I had no chance, I ran into a dark alley to surrender. I was immediately surrounded, knives and guns pointing at me from all sides.

From that moment I remember only fragments. I started rattling off words, saying something like: wait, let me show you my pictures, explain why I'm here, and if you don't like it, you can kill me. Whether that tipped the balance, I don't know. But after much yelling about what they should do with me, they marched me out to the main street with weapons at my back. I was shaking at the thought that someone might pull the trigger by accident. They told me to walk straight out the road until I was out of town. To return to my car, I now had to walk two miles out and two miles back on a parallel street. I thought of calling a taxi or the police, but abandoned the idea: I had no money, and being seen with the cops would convince them I truly wasn't on their side.

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

So I ran from tree to tree in the darkness to avoid being seen from cars—since it might be them. The scene was like In the Heat of the Night, only racially reversed.

I got back unharmed and roared out of town. I'd had enough of staying in the ghetto for that night. I later analyzed what went wrong. I had been dishonest with the criminals: I pretended to be a poor vagabond needing a place to sleep, but I had a car hidden nearby and knew I could sleep in it if needed. Because I wasn't fully honest, I couldn't make the positive impression needed to open them up.

I drove out to a nearby white community. After this grim experience I sensed, as often in my travels, that something fantastic would happen next. When you're most down, you're lifted highest up afterward—just as two weeks earlier I'd frozen for hours in a West Virginia snowstorm only to end up at the Rockefellers that same night. Without such vagabond fatalism you are lost: through your conviction you radiate strong the positive energy that helps create the favorable situation you need.

Anyhow, when I that night stepped into a bar on Wrightsville Beach I wasn't surprised when a sweet young woman came over, tugged my beard, and asked who I was. Things went fast and she began pouring wine into me. When you stand completely alone in the world, you fall in love easily; but when you've just an hour earlier faced death, that feeling becomes totally overwhelming.

Anyone who'd shown warmth that night I'd have bound myself to. One of her first questions was whether I had a place to stay. When I said no, she immediately insisted I move in with her. She'd give me all the money I needed and a gasoline credit card for the car. She belonged to one of America's richest families—the Schlitz brewery. I'll never forget that night.

Usually I'm impotent the first night with a new woman, but the violent experience was still with me in my thoughts and everything went as it should. It was like the time in New Orleans when Mary Ann Westbury and I witnessed our friend kill another while playing pool, and afterward we went home and made love all night.

Sex and violence are intimately connected; I feel that many of my U.S. love affairs have been preceded—or followed—by violence. My love for the country might be of the same nature.
That night we fell so much in love that she started talking of marriage immediately. When we got married, I would receive $50,000, then $30,000 a year. "I want a child with you," she said. During the first days I myself was so convinced that I was getting married that I started writing to all my friends that "now I had finally found the right one."

I was fascinated by her upper-class ways. She spent money like water; within a week we'd burned through hundreds of dollars and she had to telegraph her father in Europe for more. I enjoyed going to the finest restaurants—lobster, steak—after months of soul food.

But I still insisted on continuing my exploring and drove out in the car in the daytime to photograph the hunger in eastern North Carolina. A geophagy expert had told me of the dirt-eaters there. By day I photographed hunger; by night I gorged on steaks. Every other day I had to spent with my fiancée on a nearby island, reserved for the rich. A guard on the bridge kept blacks and the poor away. We lived in a large villa and lay on the beach all day loafing.

It was here I began losing interest in her: I was simply bored to death. At first she took some interest in my "hobby," but soon her view of blacks as subhuman became clear.

1974 - Charleston, SC

I have often fallen in love with Southern racists because of their exoticism and charming dialect and my fascination with the person behind the master/slave relationship, but it slowly dawned on me that you cannot base a marriage on that.

I began to feel any child we had would be more a product of violence than love. When I asked what she'd do if we drifted apart, she said, "Don't worry—I've got enough money. I can get an abortion anytime." She was madly in love with me, but I was getting my feet back on the ground. When she soon after had to travel to the Galápagos to look at turtles and wanted me along, I was first tempted but ended up saying no. It would be good to get her at a little distance and cool off. She asked me come back for her birthday, which I promised to do.

I hitchhiked a couple of thousand miles to get back on that day and arrived at noon and thought she would be happy. But she just lay on her bed, cold and distant. She'd had a fine vacation with the turtles but had begun to feel that we weren't suited for each other. She'd gone to Ecuador for an abortion—expensive and difficult "in that primitive Catholic country."

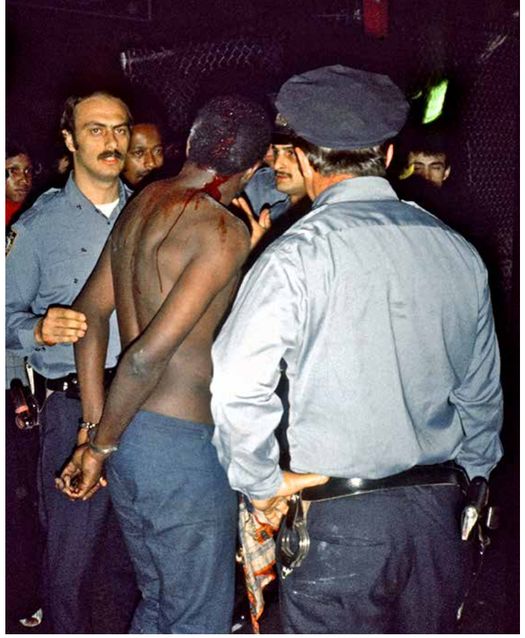
Now she had no feelings left for me. I found her shallow, but had been superficial myself. I was both deeply hurt and very relieved at the same time, said goodbye, and went back into the Wilmington ghetto to try again to live there.
I went to the same bar—this time in daylight—and bought a round of Schlitz for the people with the money left from my luxury days. And this time I was being accepted, and there was chatter and talk and a warmth without equal. It was at that time that Schlitz launched its new slogan: "Only love is better than Schlitz." Whenever I saw it around the country, I thought of Wilmington and its violent racial hatred.

Summary of letters

***Afternote:** I omit the Schlitz woman's name and photos since sometime in the '80s, her parents told me she had just committed suicide. I found it strange that the only two of my old girlfriends who later took their own lives were both millionaires*

Both 1974 - Harlem, NY

1974 - NYC



Below 1973 - NYC

1973 - New Orleans

Searching for the inner goodness behind the shadows of anger

"Policing in our communities has become deeply militarized, generating fear and resentment instead of safety and trust." - Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow"

The crime of the poor—like the exploitation of the rich—is almost impossible to photograph. You can record the results, but rarely the process. Usually I'd be with criminals for days before photographing them. To survive, I had to hold an unwavering faith in the inner goodness of these children of anger, reaching for the human being inside and away from the roles the system forced upon them.

Whenever I photographed their shady activities, I found myself relating more to their environmental side than their humanity. In doing so, I betrayed, in small ways, the trust they placed in me. I wanted to photograph crime from the criminal's own point of view, but the moment I stepped back to document it, I was no longer "one of them." The system's violence was easier to photograph than its counter-violence.

Here I was caught in a shootout between police and criminals in Harlem. A policeman rushed over and used my doorway as a firing position, placing me, photographically at least, on the side of the police. In moments like this I began to understand the brutal—but tragically human—reactions of the police. Their racist attitudes and lack of understanding of ghetto life are among the reasons for the angry accusations of police brutality. Society has trained the police to expect the worst instead of communicating with the good in people. Thus they often shoot before they question.

To carry weapons into a ghetto is, in itself, an act of violence. It announces that you have no faith in the people you police—and that distrust breeds counter-violence.

During my first two years in America, I carried my own internalized white fear—the core ingredient of all racism. Until I learned nonviolent communication and a more positive way of thinking about my fellow human beings, I was constantly beaten down by blacks.

So if the police build only on the negative in people, they inevitably reinforce it. If, instead, they arrived unarmed and with open faces, they'd have a chance to call forth the goodness I always managed to find—even in the "worst types" who might kill for a dollar, or for a camera. Instead, the police create a climate of fear on both sides, making brutality unavoidable. And until the recent flood of video evidence forced accountability, most police violence was sanctioned by white authorities. Many states still allow police to break into homes without knocking. Many innocent people have died this way.

No knock song by Gil Scott-Heron - illustrated

"Police brutality is not an aberration, it's a feature of the system....We are living in a system where the police can break down your door, kill you in your sleep, and get away with it." - Assata Shakur, poet and political activist.

As a member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) she was convicted in the murder of a policeman, but fled prison. She died in Cuba, as a fugitive. She was the first woman to be put on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists list.

You explained it to me, I must admit,
a long rap about "no knock"
being legislated for the people
you've always hated
in this hell-hole you/we call home.
NO KNOCK the man will say
to protect people from themselves.
Who's going to protect me from you?
No knocking, head rocking, enter shocking,
shooting, cursing,
killing, crying, lying and being white.
NO KNOCK told my brother Fred Hampton
bullet holes all over the place.
But if you're a wise "no knocker"
you'll tell your knocking' lackeys
no knock on my brother's head
no knock on in my sisters head
and double lock your door
because someone may be
NO KNOCKING ... For you!

Black Lives Matter: James' and Barbara's love

"I can't breathe. Please, I can't breathe." - George Floyd

One day I saw in The New York Times a photo of Mayor Lindsay presenting flowers to a "heroic" officer in a hospital bed. It said the officer had been shot while "entering an apartment." I wanted to know what had really happened and spent several days in the Bronx tracking down the relatives and the apartment. Slowly the truth emerged.

James and Barbara were a young black couple living in Fort Apache, then the worst neighborhood in America, around Fox Street in the South Bronx. One day they heard burglars on the roof and called the police. Two plain-clothes officers arrived and kicked in the door without knocking. Thinking the burglars were breaking in, James fired at the door. The police fired back and killed him. Barbara fled screaming into the neighbor's apartment. When I went to the 41st Precinct they confirmed the story and admitted there had been "a little mistake," but insisted that James "was asking for it" by having an unregistered gun.

I had grown so accustomed to this type of American logic that I felt no particular indignation toward the officer—only that he was wrong. Since I had spent so much time gathering the facts, I decided to attend the funeral as well. I borrowed a decent shirt and arrived at the funeral home about an hour early. I took some pictures of James in the coffin. He was very handsome. I admired the fine job the undertaker had done with plastic to fill the bullet holes. Black undertakers are artists in this grim field; even people who have had their eyes torn out they can get to look perfectly normal. Since black bodies arrive in every possible condition, they draw on the entire color spectrum of materials. James, however, made little impression on me; I had already seen so many young black corpses. I simply wondered why there was no floral wreath from the police. I waited about an hour, which was to be the last normal hour that day.

Not more than ten people came, all surprised to see a white man there. A young guy whispered that it was "unbecoming" for a white person to attend this funeral. Suddenly terrible screams erupted in the hall. Three men carried Barbara in, her legs dragging on the floor, incapable of walking. She was a tall, beautiful, light-skinned woman, but her screams made me shudder. Never before had I heard such excruciating and pain-filled screams. When she reached the coffin it became unbearable. It was the only time in America I was unable to photograph. I had taken pictures with tears running down my cheeks before, but had always kept myself at such a distance from the suffering that I was able to record it.

When Barbara came up to the coffin, she threw herself onto James's body, screaming so it cut through marrow and bone, "James, wake up, wake up!" again and again.
People tried to pull her away, but Barbara noticed nothing. I was at this point convinced James would rise.
Through much of the suffering I had seen in America, I have often sensed a certain hypocrisy or shallowness amidst it, enabling me to distance myself from it.

Barbara knocked the ground out from beneath me. Everything spun before my eyes and suddenly I found myself rushing, weeping, out of the funeral home. I ran for blocks, crying uncontrollably, through streets where nine out of ten die an unnatural death. Criminals stood in doorways, but I stumbled past them, tripping over garbage cans and broken bottles. It's a wonder no one mugged me—they must have assumed I had just been mugged.

At James and Barbara's apartment building, still crying, I asked some children if anyone was in the apartment "of the man who was shot the other day." They asked if I meant the man shot across the street the night before. No, it was in this building, I said. But they had not heard that anyone had been shot in their building.
They lived on the third floor; James and Barbara on the sixth.

Upstairs, I found the apartment empty—robbers had already ransacked it, only bits of paper were scattered on the floor. The emptiness made me sob harder. Bullet holes riddled the living room wall where James had been sitting, though only two were in the door which the police had kicked open. Like all New Yorkers, they had three locks on the door and a thick bar set in the floor to prevent criminals from forcing it—a precaution police themselves recommend.

James and Barbara had been so terrified of crime that they'd bolted steel bars over the windows, though they lived six stories up with no fire escape. The courtyard was piled three feet deep with garbage thrown from the windows.

1974 - Bronx, NY

James and Barbara had lived here since they were sixteen with their four-year-old daughter. After some hours I ventured out again. I had cried so much I had a splitting headache. The weeping returned in waves all the way into Manhattan. When I reached a movie theater, I wandered in without thinking. The film was Sounder, a romanticized story of a black family in 1930s Louisiana. There was an overwhelming sense of love and togetherness in the family, but in the end the father was taken away by the white authorities and sent to a work camp for having stolen a piece of meat.
The Hollywood film romanticized the poverty; after several years in a work camp, the father came back to the family, so the film would have a happy ending. This wasn't the kind of poverty I had met up with in the South. Only the scenes that reminded me of James and Barbara made me cry.

Afterward I drifted toward Broadway. An old black woman I had stayed with in the North Bronx had given me ten dollars for funeral clothes. She had first suspected I was an undercover cop and spent hours calling police stations asking them what was the idea of sending an undercover cop to her house. Once convinced otherwise, she was overjoyed, pressed the ten dollars into my hand, made me promise to return, and even phoned her daughter in Alaska so I could speak with her.

Now I still had a little money left and in my strange state, I walked into another theater on Broadway and saw Farewell, Uncle Tom—a brutal depiction of slavery made by non-Americans (in Italy), so it didn't romanticize slavery. The slave auctions, torture devices, men who were sold away from their families —some scenes nearly made me vomit. How could all this have been allowed to happen only a hundred years ago? I repeatedly looked around the theater, terrified there might be black viewers present. But there were only two other people.

When I came out, a young black guy stood on the sidewalk with sunglasses on. I looked at him a long time. I couldn't understand why he didn't knock me down.
For days afterward I was a wreck. I will never forget that day, completely blank in my diary. A whole year passed before I gathered the courage to seek out Barbara. At the veterans' hospital kitchen where she worked, an older woman came out to speak with me. She said she was Barbara's guardian because Barbara had not been herself since the funeral—withdrawn, silent, no longer speaking.

I asked what she had been like before. The woman paused, then told me, with tears in her eyes, of the four years James and Barbara had worked together there: always singing, always happy, arriving together and leaving together. But she wouldn't let me see Barbara, for Barbara did not wish to see anyone.

Another year went by before I sent Barbara a letter from the South. I assumed that by now Barbara had gotten over her husband's murder and returned to the hospital. The same elderly woman met me. Time seemed not to have passed. She looked deeply at me and sighed: "Barbara has gone insane," she said.

Barbara followed me in my thoughts wherever I traveled. But another event soon cut just as deep. In a Florida ghetto, an unhappy white woman had climbed a water tower and stood on the edge, about to commit suicide. A crowd—mostly black—gathered below. Police and firefighters pleaded with her not to jump, while the crowd shouted for her to do it. I was horrified. I shouted back, "Stop it—let the poor woman live!" But their shouts only grew louder. It was the worst and most sickening mass hysteria I had ever experienced. Then suddenly the screams blended in my mind with Barbara's on that unforgettable morning. My knees went weak and I ran away as fast as I had from the funeral home.

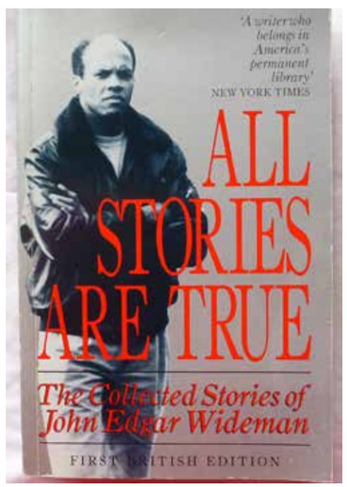
In five years I will try to contact Barbara again. I must see her face again someday!

Summary of letters

1974 - Bronx, NY

John Wideman wrote a short story inspired by my story in "a voice foretold":

"The photographer's a tall ship listing, swaying, sea-smacked, driven by crazy winds. He's my leader. A rock I want to squeeze till blood runs out. He knew about this place, about the murder here. Now, because of him, I know. Proof in his pictures. The picture book/diary I began to leaf through, then couldn't let go, needed to squeeze till the blood ran out.... Should I believe what he says? That he hitchhikes north and south, east and west, crisscrossing the country without a penny in his pocket, somehow managing to eat, find places to sleep, buy film for his camera. By any and all means possible. Dependent on the goodness, the evil in his fellowmen. Vagabonding, the photographer calls it. Like ancient, raggedy Oedipus with his swollen feet wandering the land, seeking sanctuary. How long has he been on the road? His funk says years. A lifetime ripening....But this is not a story about him. His Ingmar Bergman accent, the black lilt, slur, lisp, and dance he mimics in his speech, his walk. That I mimic now. His ***American Pictures*** *brought me here. I'm behind him. In his debt."*



1975 - San Francisco, CA

1973 - Jersey City, NJ with World Trade Center behind

To Fight Oppression, Know the Bondage of Both Peoples

"You cannot fight an enemy that you do not understand." - Malcolm X

On the day I became one with the suffering, I could no longer depict it. The screams inside a closed system drown in a vacuum unheard by the world outside. A white policeman beating a Black woman was shot down in anger by a young man on a roof.

In retaliation, 5,000 officers marched through the ghetto to intimidate the already oppressed. Every time a policeman is killed by a Black sniper, the entire apparatus of colonial power swings into motion.

But a deeper tragedy underlies these sad police killings. The 26-year-old widow of the officer comes, like he did, from the poorest white stratum.

This doesn't excuse police brutality, but it helps us understand it: these whites, exploited and downtrodden themselves, face such grim prospects that they often feel forced to join the ranks of the old slave-drivers.

The racism and mistrust produced by their own under-stimulated, impoverished upbringing is intensified by their nervousness of serving as an occupying force in a culture to which they do not belong.

1973 - Jersey City, NJ

1975 - San Francisco

Seeing the Human Behind the System That Breaks Us

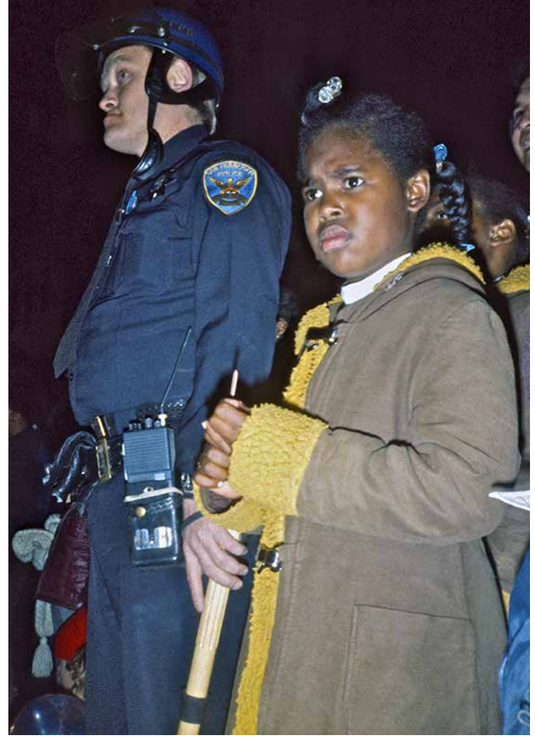
"The Black Lives Matter movement is not a war against police officers, it is a war against a system of oppression and dehumanization that has plagued this country since its inception." — John Legend

It's become common to attack the police, but we forget that they're just as much the victims of the system as they are its representatives. We look at their tight lips and hardened faces and despair. One can only infer that they will forever be marked with bitterness, hatred, and apprehension. But did they sit in front of the mirror of their own free will and create these faces?
Or were they merely forced into lives that hardened their faces into a distorted mask of humanity? Yes, a more just society is hard to build because even seeing the possibility of change requires faith—faith in humanity's inner goodness and in your daily ability to look past the distress patterns that define and paralyze us all.
Our task is nothing less than transforming a system built on our inherited pain so that people everywhere can reclaim their full humanity. In doing so, we may even save the planet from its greatest oppression: the destruction of our environment, our climate, and our children's future.
I know I would never have survived among so many wounded people in America without consciously believing in the good within them. Without that faith, the worst would have prevailed—and it would have consumed me.

1972 - Miami Beach, FL

1972 - Miami

1973 - Jersey City, NJ



1975 - San Francisco

1972 - Miami Beach, FL

1971 - NYC

1971 - NYC

The survivors in Attica: (Photo: New York State Police)

1971 - Brooklyn, NY - Funeral of Attica victims

1971 - Brooklyn, NY

Muligvis sort baggrund på venstre side

Beyond Hate: Seeing the Human Behind the Mask of Power

"We have to dismantle the architecture of oppression. We have to dismantle the systems of oppression. We have to dismantle the mindsets of oppression." - Kimberlé Crenshaw

"We are capable of moving beyond the legacy of pain and building a world where all life is sacred." —bell hooks

My journey has taught me that I can no longer hate any person, group, or class—not even the worst exploiters. If I said I hated the Rockefeller family, I'd be lying. Yes, Nelson Rockefeller ordered the Attica massacre, killing ten guards and 33 inmates who were demanding basic prison reform and to be treated as human beings.

And yes, I was at the mass funeral, heard the armed Black Panthers shout "Death to Rockefeller! Jail the rich, free the poor!", knew relatives among the weeping families, and again saw the blood-red stripes of the African-American flag. Even then, I found I couldn't hate Rockefeller.

For behind the role he was raised to believe in and perform in this system is a human being who, under different conditions, would never have become a "murderer" trying desperately to keep the ghetto's inmates in their place.

If we can see that the underclass kills because the world has starved their hope, then we must also see that the upper class kills because the world has fed their fear. The more I let myself be brainwashed into the upper class, the more its actions began to seem reasonable.

Oppression is a double-edged sword; it wounds the hand that wields it and the neck that bears it.

1974 - Attica prison, NY

1971 - NYC

1991 - Washington, DC

1985 - NYC

Only Love can defeat Hate

"We can't expect the world to change if we don't change ourselves." - Solange Knowles

"Love is an endless act of forgiveness. Forgiveness is me giving up the right to hurt you for hurting me." —Beyoncé

I'd be dishonest if I pretended I hadn't grown fond of many people I met in America's upper class. When I condemn the upper class, it's really the system within us all I condemn—the system that created these classes and taught its members to rob and kill not only in the U.S. but also in the Third World. It's an inhuman system too powerful to be changed by attacking its symbols alone.
If I had hated the Rockefellers as symbols, I would have denied the human warmth and hospitality they offered me as a vagabond, outside the roles society assigns.

The longer I wandered as an outsider, the less I wished ever to rejoin the system. Everywhere it had given people a false face. The clearer these distorted masks became, the stronger my desire to get behind them and look out through the eye slits. It was never beautiful—only fear, hatred, and mistrust. I had no desire to join that hatred.

I learned it is far easier to hate than to understand.
Hatred thrives on simplified judgments. Most people are so consumed by the pain of not living up to their milieu's norms that reducing reality to symbols feels easier than understanding it. When reading a book like this, it is far easier to hate whites than to examine the forces within oneself.

Only when we recognize how we, too, participate in oppression can we understand, challenge, and transform what dehumanizes us all.

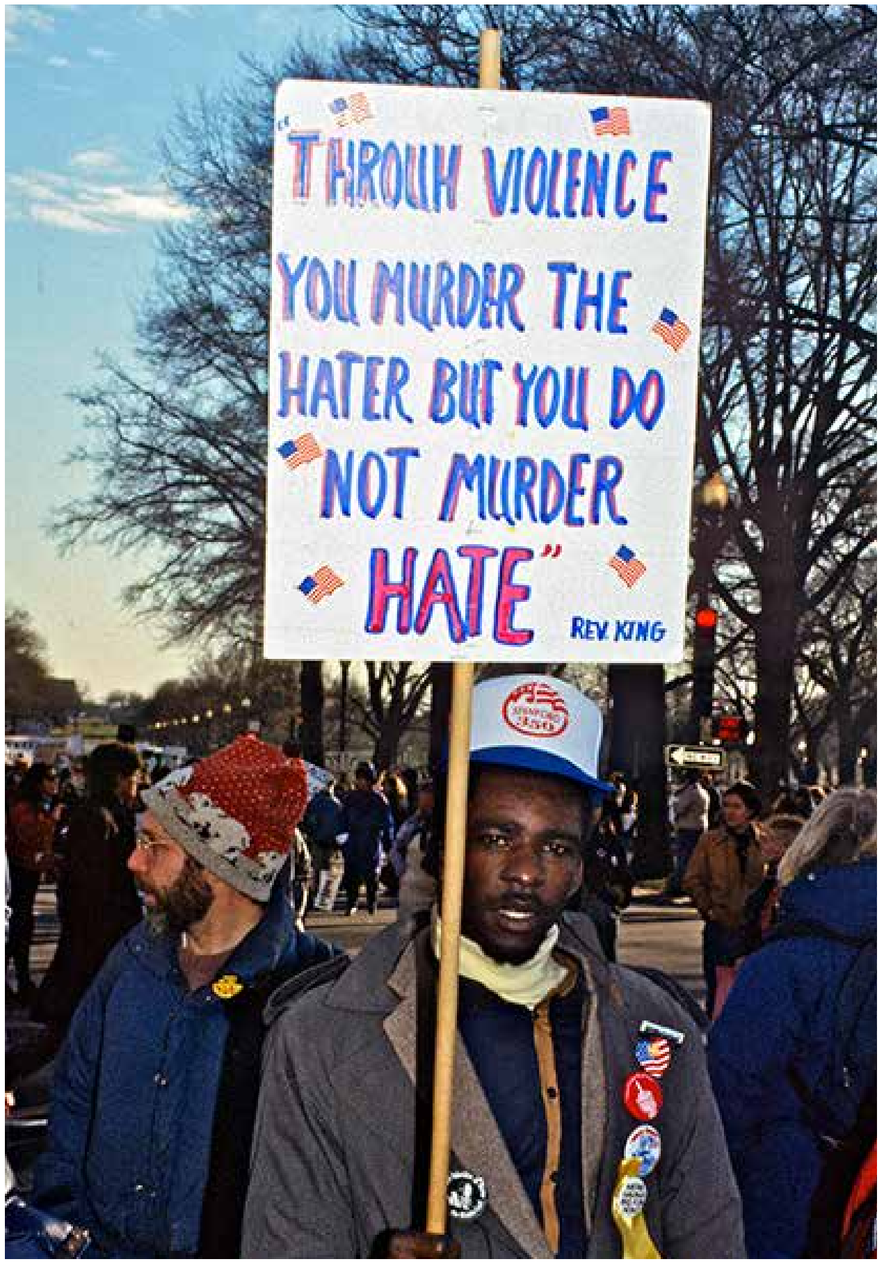
I survived outside the system because I always sought the human being behind the false façade where I saw the defeat of love. The fewer the threads binding a wholesome society, the more petrified and impenetrable seemed the masks I had to penetrate to survive.

Still, even within oppression, it's possible to find many shades of humanity. Even though love is crushed again and again, we all know love can still shoot up through the asphalt whenever ... wherever ...

1990 - NYC

1991 - NYC

You Sure Love to Ball song by Marvin Gaye - illustrated - followed by church scenes



1991 - Washington, DC

1991 - Bullock County, AL

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

1975 - Bullock County, AL

"The most common thing people do not understand is that love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence." - James Baldwin

"Our lives are like our love, both fierce and tender, a delicate balance between beauty and pain." - bell hooks

"Our love is a hurricane force, a supernova, a force so powerful it bends time and space." - Beyoncé

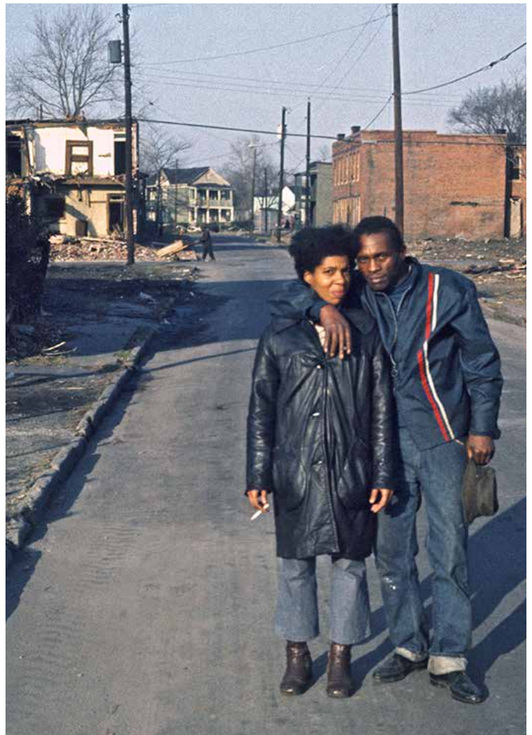
"Love is the weapon of the future. It is the only armor that will defeat hate and fear." - Tupac Shakur

"Black love is unapologetic, fierce, and resilient. It is a flame that burns bright even in the darkest of times." - Imani Perry

"Black love is not just a feeling, it's a commitment, a fight, a revolution." - Janelle Monae,

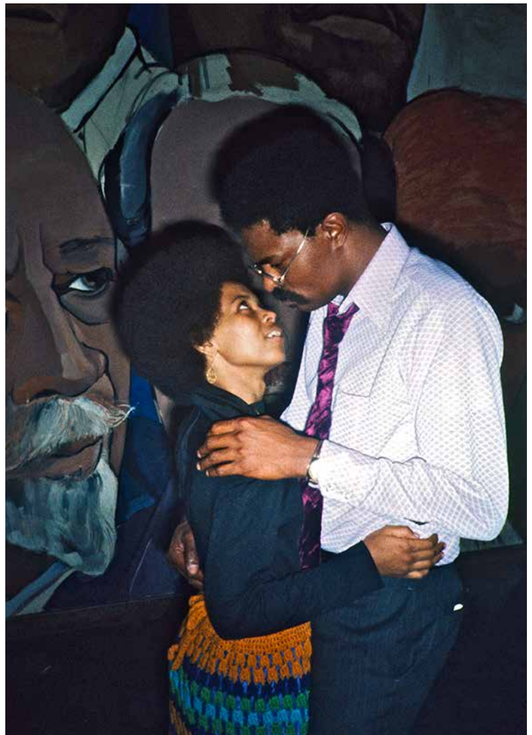
1975 - Richmond, VA

1974 - Norfolk, VA

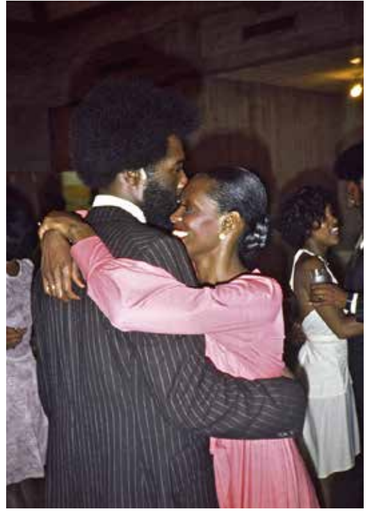


2009 - Gainesville, FL

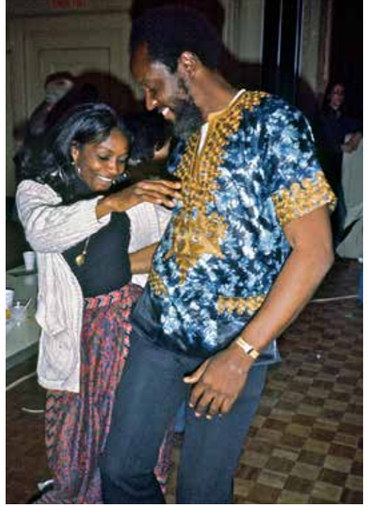
1973 - Harlem, NY. Communist Party Vice President candidate Jarvis Tyner



1975 - Philadelphia, PA - René Yates and boyfriend - See update about her life



Hearts rising above the asphalt in the triumphant spirit of black love



1975 - San Francisco

1975 - San Francisco

1985 - Harlem, NY

2012 - St. Francisville, LA

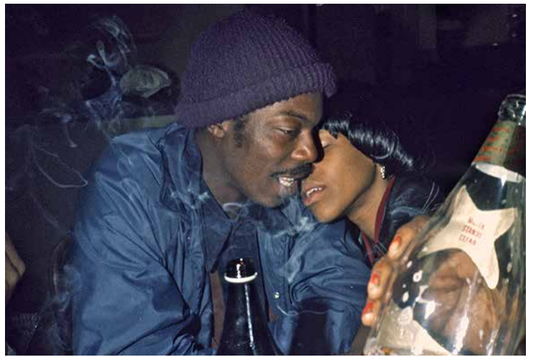
"Our love is a tapestry woven with threads of joy, pain, resistance, and triumph." - Ta-Nehisi Coates

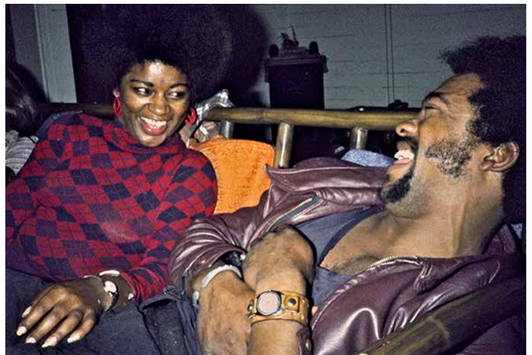
1973 - Greensboro, NC

"We are worthy of love, deserving of love, and capable of giving love. Let us celebrate Black love in all its forms."
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

"Black love is a beacon of hope, a testament to the human spirit's capacity for resilience and joy." - Kwame Alexander

1973 - Zebulon, NC. - Caroline was later murdered





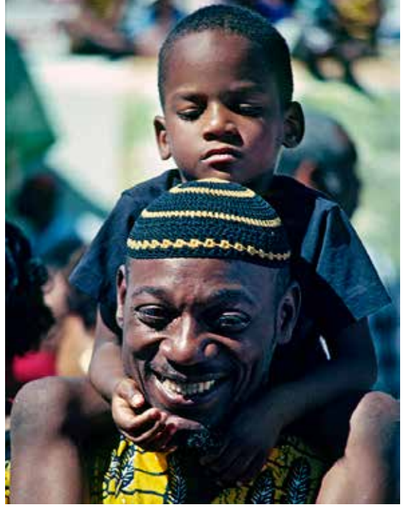
1974 -
Abilene, TX

"Black love is the resistance. It is the act of choosing ourselves, choosing each other, choosing joy and defiance in the face of everything trying to tear us down."
- Yrsa Daley-Ward

"Black love is beautiful, resilient, and complex. It's a love that has endured through centuries of oppression and continues to thrive." - Tressie McMillan Cottom

"Black love is the foundation of our community. It's the fuel that keeps us moving forward."
- Beyoncé

2004 - NYC



Left
1993 - Brooklyn, NY
Right
1985 - Harlem, NY

"Black love is a refuge. It's a safe space in a world that often feels unsafe." - Cleo Wade

"Black love is a sanctuary. It's a place where we can be our most authentic selves and be loved for who we truly are." - Ijeoma Oluo

"Love recognizes no barriers. It leaps hurdles, jumps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope." - Maya Angelou

1996 - Chicago

1991 - Houston, TX

Below 1975 - Philadelphia, PA

1975 - Baumont, TX

Below 1978 - Jacksonville, FL

"Black love is a revolution. It is a war cry. It is a victory dance." - Yrsa Daley-Ward

"Love's the only thing that's never wasted. In Black love, we find the freedom to exist without permission." - Frank Ocean

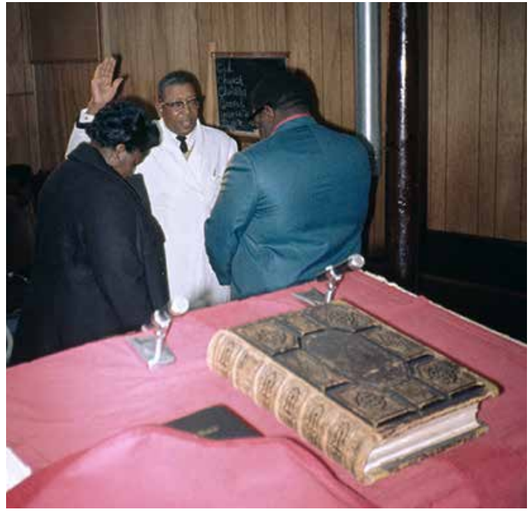
"Love is a revolution. It's what keeps us going, what breaks the chains, what makes us free."
– H.E.R.

"Love is not just a word, it's action. It's protection, it's truth, it's the fire that keeps us alive when everything else tries to burn us down."
- Kendrick Lamar

"Our love is how we survive. Black love is bold, it's soft, it's everything they said we couldn't have — and we love anyway."
– Rihanna

"When I love, I love with my whole being, and that love is not up for negotiation. Black love is sacred, it is mine, and it is powerful."
- Solange Knowles

1996 - Tunica, LA - Bibel reader



1973 - Baltimore - Wedding in storefront church

"The love of God is the most powerful force in the world." - Sojourner Truth

"Faith is not an avoidance of difficulty but an embrace of grace in the midst of difficulty." - Dr. Bernice King

"Black theology doesn't deny God's love for white people, but it insists that love cannot be blind to oppression." - James Cone

Both 1975 - San Francisco

1975 - San Francisco

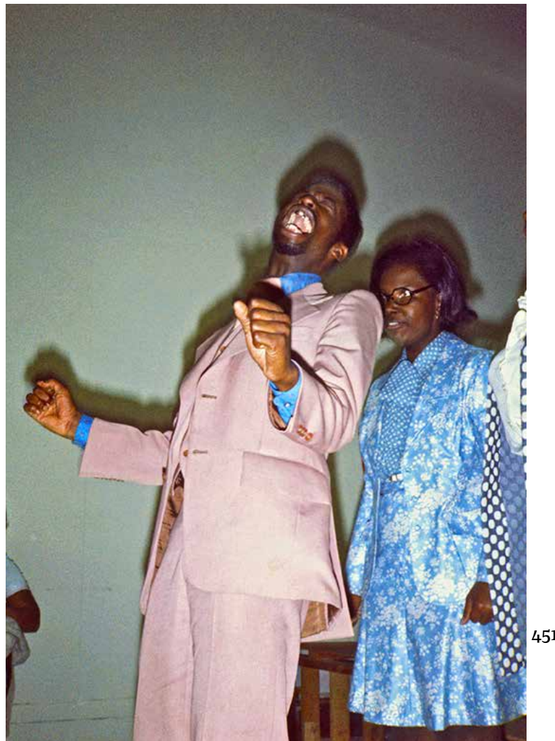
1973 - from rural church outside Houma, LA

"Faith is the bridge that carries us over when our own two feet won't." - Maya Angelou

"The Negro church in America is the only institution in the world where the Negro is free." - James Baldwin

"The God of the Negro church is a God of the underdog. He is a God who can make a way out of no way." - Toni Morrison

Both lelow 1975 - San Francisco - Fillmore ghetto storefront church



1975 - Philadelphia, MS.
Hands of my father-in-law,
Rev. Jake Rush

2009 - Harlem, NY - Mosque on 116th St

"Islam is not a new religion. It is the same truth that God revealed to all His prophets throughout history. Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy, and forgiveness that should not be associated with acts of violence against the innocent."
- Yusuf Islam or Cat Stevens, whom I introduced on stage for a week in The Gaslight.

"Faith is the audacity to hope when hope seems hopeless." - Maya Angelou

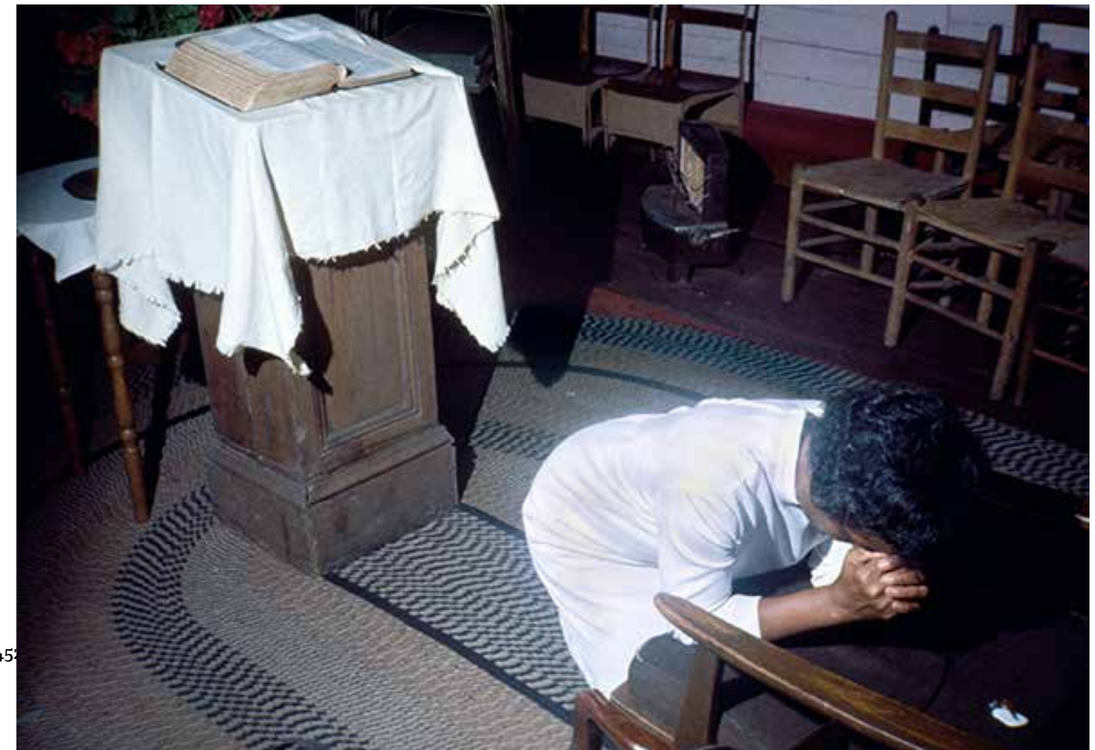
"There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." - Marian Wright Edelman

"Faith is the only thing that can keep you going when you feel like giving up." - Sister Souljah

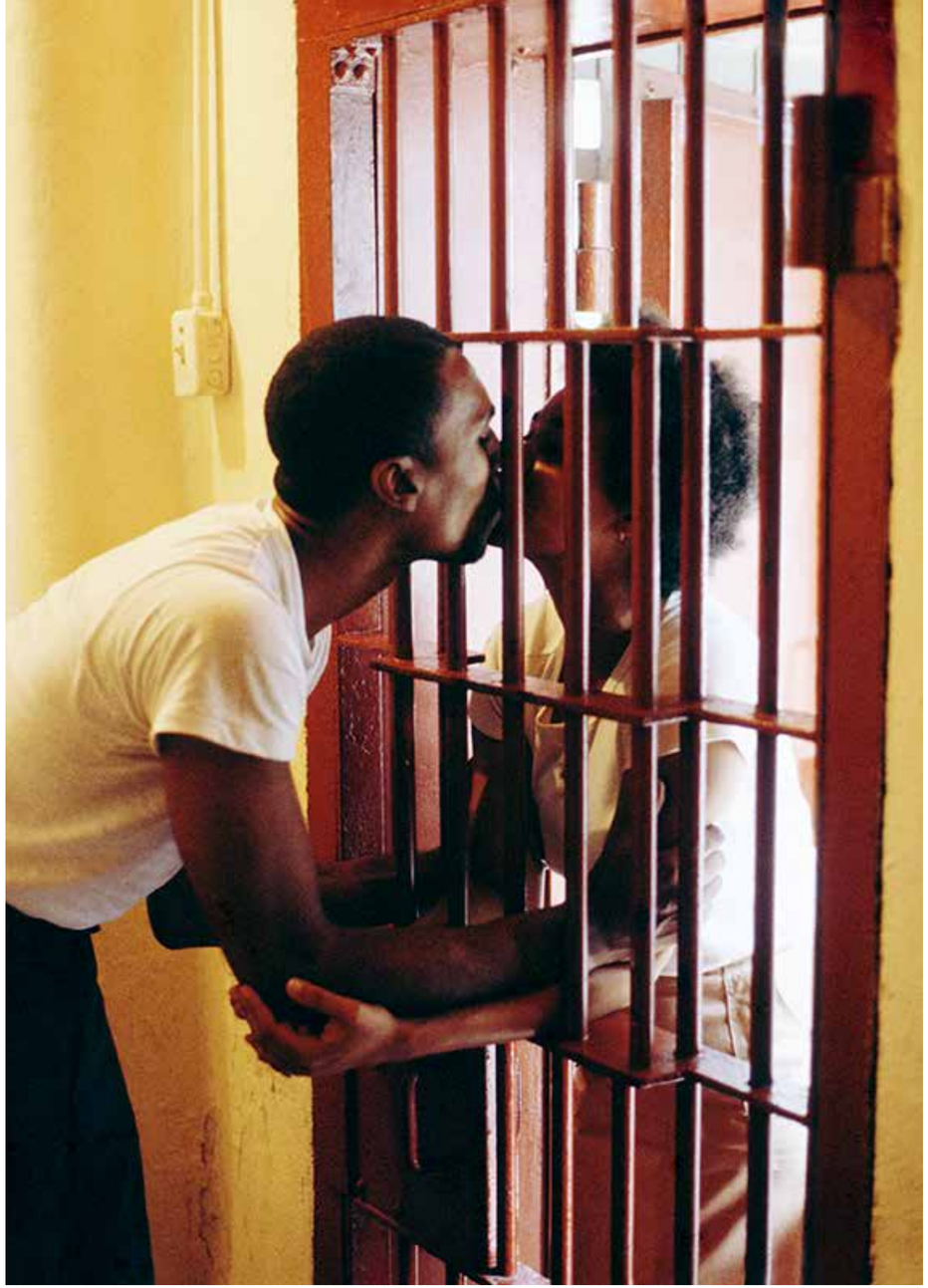
"Islam has always been part of America. Muslims have enriched our society since our founding. They are as diverse as our nation itself. They are black and white, Latino and Asian, immigrants and American-born, and some of the most distinguished and patriotic among us." — Barack Obama

"I believe in the religion of Islam. I believe in Allah and peace." – Muhammed Ali

1975 - Meridian, MS - Shack church



2003 – Philadelphia, MS - Easter service in church of my former father-in-law, Rev. Jake Rush



1978 - Washington, GA

Possible black background on left page

Ghetto love

"Love takes off the masks we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within."
—James Baldwin

"There is no love like ghetto love"

After four years of vagabonding in the ghetto I ended up getting married to it. Annie is the only woman I recall having taken the initiative with. As she sat there in a restaurant in New York—irresistibly beautiful—it was evident from our first glances that we needed each other. We were both easy victims: she knew nobody, having just returned from ten years of exile in England to attend her mother's funeral, and I was in one of my depressed periods of vagabonding. We were both children of ministers and had rebelled, in different ways, against our backgrounds. She was deeply moved by my photos and wanted to help publicize them. With her strong literary bent and broader intellectual horizon, I soon became dependent on her to help the pieces of my puzzle fall into place.

To a large degree Annie had freed herself, during her exile, from the master–slave mentality that makes marriage almost insupportable for the few unfortunate Americans who fall in love athwart the realities of the closed system. "Intermarriage" is indeed a subversive act. Even liberals grope for an answer when asked, "Would you want your daughter to marry one?" I often found segregationists beginning with, "I don't care whether people are white, black, purple, or green..." Ten sentences later they were sworn enemies of intermarriage.

Yet until it was prohibited in 1691, there were many intermarriages between white and black indentured servants, and before the reduction of blacks to slavery, "poor white" hatred of them was unknown. In most other countries—even post-slavery societies like Cuba and Brazil—nothing resembles the American fanaticism around intermarriage.

Coming from a conservative rural area, I cannot recall a single negative remark in my childhood about the frequent marriages between Danes and African students. On the contrary, there was solidarity and even envy toward those moving to distant lands. But in America no interracial marriage can be seen as a natural union.

In Hollywood, Black promoters wanted to invest heavily in publicizing my slideshow—on the condition that I remove the section about my wife. "It destroys your message," they said, "makes you look like just another liberal." For the same reason many Blacks and liberals will fall away in this chapter. One Black woman was furious after seeing my slideshow with photos of several naked Black women, unaware of my Danish background, where nudity was widely cultivated at the time—family beaches and inner-city parks filled with nude Danes minutes after the sun appeared. "Aren't you aware how irresponsible you've been," she asked, "having relationships with all these mentally unbalanced women? Aren't you aware that slavery makes us all mentally ill?" She hit the core question: how can I intervene as a neutral in a master–slave society without becoming part of the problem?

Yet she made the same mistake as most Americans in assuming that a photo of a naked woman equals a sexual relationship.

She need not really worry. Unlike what I found among Black women in much of Africa, Black American women have developed strong defense mechanisms against white men after centuries of abuse. Although I spent most of my time in Black communities, more than 90% of the women who invited me to share their beds were white. Still, suspicion of the white male sexual exploiter always hovered over me. Walking at night through Southern ghettos, young men would ask, "Sir, you want me to get you a woman?"

I am convinced most women would not have offered me hospitality had they not sensed the non-aggressive component in me. I always saw my vagabonding as a passive role, neither avoiding nor initiating sexual relations, and it is interesting to examine what actually happened when I came close to women. After a few days, if we got along, white women often expressed sexual aggression. But even when we became intimate, usually nothing more happened with Black underclass women, especially in the South. It was as if something misfired in us both—a shared recognition that this was too large a historical abscess to puncture. She could not avoid signaling, consciously or not, that this was a relationship between a free and an unfree person, which immediately made me feel like just another white sexual exploiter.

1974 - Our wedding in City Hall, NY with baby of the South African counselor

1975 - Annie in the Tenderloin, San Francisco

Most of my sexual and long-term relationships with Black women were therefore with middle-class women or West Indians who, though often more conservative than white or underclass women, had freed themselves from this slavery to a greater degree. Some Americans argue that if one knows certain people live in slavery, a privileged white should avoid intimate relationships that might lead to sex or marriage. But slavery is produced precisely by not associating freely and equally— thereby isolating and crippling it.

Annie was one of my few exceptions from the underclass. Although she appeared "middle class" after her years in England, her fundamental outlook was shaped by her underclass upbringing. Such a relationship might have worked with trust and effort, but because of my racism, sexism, and above all my unseeing "innocence"—the ultimate privilege of the ruling class—it did not. Instead it became such a crushing defeat that I could not reconcile it with my original book. Even the beginning went wrong. We married on Friday the 13th of September with no place to live.

A maid let us spend our honeymoon in the luxury apartment of the South African consul, who had been called home by his apartheid regime. Soon afterward we ended up in the worst area of the ghetto.

Before we'd even paid the first month's rent, all Annie's savings were stolen. We lived on the fifth floor of a building populated only by prostitutes, addicts, destitutes, and welfare mothers. Annie had not lived in underclass culture since childhood, and the shock was severe. Because of her looks and our address she was constantly targeted by pimps and hustlers trying to recruit her.

While I spent a few days with Margo St. James (leader of CYOTO for American prostitutes), Annie was kidnapped by a prostitution ring and forced at gunpoint to strip naked while they played Russian roulette to "break her in." She escaped at night through a bathroom window and fled naked into the city. When I returned, she lay dissolved in tears and pain.

The attacks continued, worsened by the fact that I was white. One day a pimp scornfully threw money at Annie on a bus. With my old vagabond habits, I picked it up. Annie was furious and didn't speak to me for a week. Violence, screams, and panic filled the building day and night. At first I tried to intervene between pimps and the "ho's" they beat. There was also a pyromaniac. Almost every night we were woken by fire alarms and flames bursting from nearby apartments. We stayed packed at all times. The first thing I always grabbed was the suitcase holding thousands of slides for this book.

Annie talking on Danish TV in 1977 about the Jim Crow segregation she grew up with

One night, standing half-naked in the street, I asked Annie to watch the suitcase while I photographed the fire. When we returned upstairs, it was gone. I ran back down and found it still standing untouched. The whole building called it a miracle; no one had ever seen valuables left unattended for even a minute without being snatched.

The psychological pressure weighed more heavily on Annie than on me. We applied for welfare to move and received only seven dollars. Almost every night she cried in despair. In the first months, when I still had some psychic surplus, I tried to enter the world that had so completely collapsed for her.

Like most of my American relationships, this one was born of violence. We met because her mother was murdered; months later her stepfather was found staggering down the street, mortally wounded by a knife. As the nights passed, a terrifying pattern from her childhood emerged. When her sixteen-year-old mother gave birth to twins, it was considered such a sin that her twin sister was sent north and Annie was sent to an aunt in Biloxi, Mississippi. Her first four years Annie remembers only the drunken aunt lying in her shack while she sat alone in the sand. Once she nearly choked to death on a chicken bone. No one came to help her.

1975 - Annie in the Tenderloin ghetto in our most depressing period

1975- Philadelphia MS - I am staying with Annie's cruel, but pious grandparents

1975- Sign on highway 19 to Phil. MS where the 3 civil rights workers were killed by the KKK

Her grandparents eventually rescued her and brought her to Philadelphia, Mississippi, where she endured a rigid fundamentalist upbringing. She was punished for playing, dancing, or showing the slightest joy. Often she was hung by leather straps in the outhouse and whipped.

2004 - Phil. MS - Revisiting Annie's family throughout my life

1975 - San Francisco - Wherever Annie walked she always read books

On the way home from school there were daily stone fights between Black and white children. One day white children unleashed German shepherds on them, badly injuring Annie.

Two of those children later joined the Klan; one, Billy Wayne Posey from Annie's street, later murdered three civil-rights workers in 1964.

After the Klan parades and burning crosses in her street, Annie fled north and later into exile. She loved books, but as the first Black child to integrate the town library she never dared return. Black children had also ostracized and mugged her for "being too white." The more these tearful nights revealed, I was shaken. She was extraordinarily sensitive. One night she cried at the thought of "the white conspiracy" that had kept Black children ignorant of the murder of six million Jews.

She would have cried even more had she known how closely that genocide was linked to the pain of her first twenty-nine years: Nazi racial laws were modeled directly on American Jim Crow racial laws in order to stigmatize otherwise well-functioning Jews. These laws made endogamy illegal, and the one-drop-of-blood rule made them an inferior, impure "race."

Finally, Annie managed to get a temporary office job in the Bureau of Architecture, where she handled bills from construction companies.
She caused turmoil by uncovering one swindle after another. With her flypaper memory, she could detect how companies had months earlier submitted bills for the same job under different wording. For years these Mafiosi had been ripping off the city. Every day she came home telling me how she had just saved the city $90,000 or the like. When her job ended, her Jewish boss told her she could write any recommendation she wished and he would sign it. But we still had no money, and it was as if this atmosphere of corruption further broke down our morale. When the rich steal, why shouldn't we?

When we once found a purse with $80 in the hallway, it took a long time to decide to return it to the owner, a welfare mother. When she opened her door she grabbed the purse without a word, with a contemptuous look that seemed to say, "You must be fools, trying to be better than others here." From that moment everything slid further in a criminal direction. It had been our idea that I should use the time to write a book.

Annie talks about growing up with KKK terror in my first version of the show in 1976, when I hadn't yet photographed a Klan meeting. Black Hollywood promoters who wanted to set up the show in 76 major cities wanted the section out because "it looks too liberal to have a black wife."

I usually stayed with Annie's cousin, Willy Rush, who is pictured here to the right. He was always fun and drunk until he "found God."
The man in the front is Annie's nephew, who is a gang member and is busy on the phone during a drug deal.

Annie and others felt I ought to write about my ghetto experiences with the eyes of a foreigner. But I sat day after day before a blank page, unable to get a word down in that violent, nerve-wracking atmosphere.

Gradually we both lost our self-confidence, and I gave up. The less surplus we had, the less hope, the more violent the atmosphere between us became. Little by little Annie began to drink in response to my growing insensitivity. She nagged me for being nothing but a naïve liberal. These endless nights are more than anything the reason for my attacks on liberals—or myself—in this book. For the first time on my journey I began to lose faith in blacks, to see actuality rather than potential.
I was becoming Americanized, a victim of the master-slave mentality.

The more I lost faith in people and in my future, the more I seethed with anger.

To avoid the unbearable atmosphere with Annie, I spent more time on the street.

The more powerless I became, the bleaker my prospects, the more she lost faith in me. One night she shouted, "You can't even provide! You hear, blue-eyed nigger, provide!" Worse still, although I constantly tried to get work, I began blaming myself. I did nothing but stand in line. In the mornings I lay in line at the blood bank for $5. Every day at eleven for eight months I stood an hour in a soup line, and at night I often ate in a church.
The rest of the day I stood in line looking for work, which was impossible since I had no skills. If I arrived at four in the morning, I sometimes got hired for a day handing out advertisements in affluent suburbs for $2 an hour.
After a while I gave up and spent more time with criminals on the street. I was never involved in large-scale crime, but I was clearly moving in that direction. One night when a man told me his brother had just been murdered in Chicago, I replied coldly, "What caliber pistol?" Only afterward did I realize how far I had fallen. During the time I lived with Annie, eight people were murdered on our block, some acquaintances. Theresa, who often gave me free food in her coffee shop, was murdered by a customer who couldn't pay a $1.41 bill. Sometimes even the hallway walls were smeared with blood. When I came home late, Annie was often lying in a fog of tears and booze. I hardly cared anymore. To avoid destructive quarrels, I stayed away until she was asleep.

1975- San Diego. Annie with my sign "Touring USA from Denmark" get ticket for hitchhiking

1976- Copenhagen. Annie helping to select and frame my 15000 slides before my first slideshow

Our sex life, like everything else, collapsed. Finally I harbored such hatred for both blacks and whites that I became afraid of myself. One night, when Annie had been drinking, I became so desperate that I struck at her in the darkness. The next morning she had a black eye, like so many others in the building. Having never before laid a hand on anyone, I was shaken. I feared I might one day kill her. The only way to break the ghettoization was flight.

We managed to get Annie a tiny room in a white home outside the ghetto. After that I went straight for the highway. The highway meant security, healing, and freedom.
For five years I had lived an escapist, privileged vagabond life in ghettos without being affected. When I became part of the ghetto, I was destroyed in less than a year—ended up hating blacks, losing faith in everything, and letting my worst traits take control. One was a growing selfishness and callousness toward women. It was no coincidence that I immediately entered a period of conspicuous consumption of "girls" with my friend Tony in North Carolina.

Yet I was no born seducer. Time and again Tony whispered, "Why don't you make a move?" and time and again he had to drive my date home prematurely. There were always obstacles. One night a shoot-out blocked us from getting home.

Another night we went to see Earth, Wind & Fire in Chapel Hill, and I used my white privilege to con my way in for free as I never had money. This infuriated Bob, who drove the car. On the way home he stopped and said, "Get out." Since Bob was a double murderer, having killed both his wife and her lover, and everybody knew he boiled inside, nobody intervened, and I had to get out in the frosty night in the middle of nowhere.

A car is essential to dating. Since I couldn't offer rides, I invited women for what I loved most of all in the world: hitchhiking. These trips made me acutely aware of my sex-exploitative mindset. I had lived with blacks so often that I paid hardly any heed to being "on the wrong side of the tracks," but to hitchhike with a black woman quickly shakes one into "place" again, especially if one is as ignorant as I had managed to remain about the additional master-slave relationship of men to women. The reactions from the white male drivers were terrifying. If they didn't content themselves with psychological torture of the women, they would use direct physical encroachment.
Although most of those I hitchhiked with were well-dressed daughters of professors and doctors in the North and had the education and trust in their surroundings which made them – unlike ghetto women - even dare to travel with a white, they were considered as nothing but easy sexual prey or even whores. Several times lustful drivers violently tried to push me out. For some of these women it was their first chance to see their country. Most didn't even last to the state line. Annie had lasted 4,000 miles through Canada and the Grand Canyon – then broke down in a hysterical fit which almost had us both arrested.

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I was still out of balance after my ghettoization and needed calm to get back on my feet. So I returned to the most harmonious and stable underclass marriage I knew: Leon and Cheryl in Augusta, Georgia. Their love and devotion to each other had been so enriching and contagious that I often thought of them during my own abortive ghetto love as living proof that real ghetto love could thrive. While I had lived in their home I had had peace and support, enabling me day after day to hitchhike out to explore the poverty in the area.

But when I arrived I immediately felt something had changed. Leon was not happy. He seemed to be in a trance as he told me his wife had died from a curable disease they couldn't afford to treat.

Leon had not recovered from the loss. He never went out of his house, which stood right next to the elite medical school in Augusta.

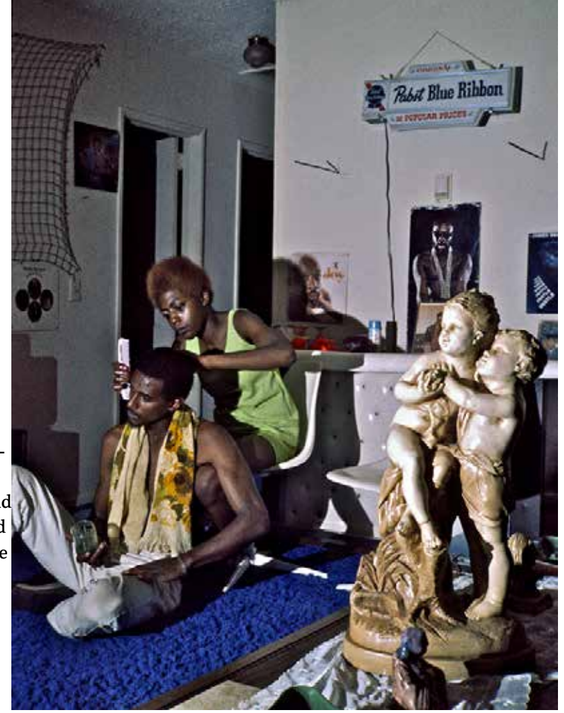
1978 - Copenhagen. Annie joined the other Americans in our work collective. Tony Harris at the end of table

All day long he sat on the blue shag carpet in front of his little stereo as if it were an altar, listening to music while staring at a photo of Cheryl above it. Some days he sang love songs throughout the day, putting her name in them. Once in a while he would scream out in the room: "I want you! I want to hold you. I want to be with you again ... We must unite, be one... I want to die... die..."

Never have I seen a man's love for a woman so intense. At most once a day he would turn around and communicate with me, only to tell me about how he wanted to join Cheryl in heaven. Sometimes he stared at me with this empty look as if I were not there and my eyes would fill with tears. I felt a deep understanding for him, yet couldn't express it. In the evenings he lay in his room. His mother would bring us cooked food in the two weeks I stayed there.

This depressing experience broke me open. I resolved to return to Annie, and later she came with me to Denmark. Our relationship had suffered too much, so after a while we separated. We achieved a good working relationship and she helped translate parts of this book and select the photos and music for slideshow it was made from.

Three years later I traveled around America to give this book to all those friends who made it possible.



1974- Augusta, GA. Leon and Cheryl in their happier moments

One of them was naturally Leon, who had helped me so much and was among those I had in mind to help run the show in Europe. But when I came to his screen door with the book under my arm, a strange woman answered my knock. No, Leon didn't live there anymore. He was shot three years ago – by a white man. All afternoon his mother showed me the photo album with Leon and Cheryl's pictures and told me tearfully about their three happy years together. We sat sobbing in each other's arms on the front porch. I know that Leon and Cheryl are united again. "There is no love like ghetto love."

Annie lived with Vibeke (my wife today) and me in our American Pictures collective in Copenhagen. Tony Harris (featured in this story) also joined us and traveled with us around Africa to find projects that we could support with the money from American Pictures. This story was written with the consent and help of my ex-wife in hospital.

Annie Holdt died in 2002 after a long illness

1978- Augusta, GA. Leon's mother with the photo album after his murder

Fortress America: From Sanctuary to Siege

"I wake up every morning in America and I am under siege." - Assata Shakur, she was Black Panther, then convicted murderer in Black Liberation Army

A society in which love and social cohesion have been killed—killed even within families, as in today's polarized America—is not a pretty sight. The Church, too, has abandoned its own social ethic and shunned the outcasts. That these outcasts then turn their backs on the Church is hardly surprising.
At one point, angry ghetto youths even entered white churches during collections and forced the congregation at gunpoint to donate to those who were truly love-starved. A despairing minister in Chicago told me his church was closing because the congregation was robbed every Sunday.

Wherever white flight leaves our fellow citizens condemned to ghettoization and ruin, our symbols of charity stand on borrowed time, their stained-glass windows shattered. Even the Danish Seamen's Church in Baltimore, where I often found peace, had to close because my friends in Alphonso's gang robbed it again and again.

1973 - NYC - Homeless outside a church

1974 - NYC. Homeless person outside a church

1973 - Baltimore 1973 - Bronx, NY

1975 - Richmond, VA

Below: Christmas Eve, 1973, in Queens, New York

1973 - Baltimore

1974 - NYC

Sanctuaries Without Sanctuary

"Where justice is denied, and one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe." -Frederick Douglass, Speech on the twenty-fourth anniversary of emancipation in Washington.

In some cities hotels post armed guards on every floor. Subways in New York and Chicago carry both uniformed and plainclothes cops—yet murders and rapes still unfold before helpless passengers.
Tourists return to Europe with "American neck" from glancing constantly over their shoulders. A Nigerian student I met in Philadelphia's ghetto was so terrified she begged to be sent home "to safety," though she had just survived the war in Biafra.

The confinement of the underclass dehumanizes all of us. In five homes I lived in, there were armed robberies—twice while I was there. Society spends billions treating the symptoms instead of teaching us how our racism harms ourselves.
We sense we are digging our own graves but, unable to stop, turn the grave into a trench. A manufacturer I lived with grew rich on military contracts, then on alarms and teargas guns—perhaps because the wars America exported abroad forced us to abandon the "war on poverty" at home.

The more we fight for "freedom" without mutual respect, the more we lose it. Many now live behind steel bars. An iron curtain slowly closes over America. We fortify ourselves everywhere against our own outcasts: stores built like cages, wealthy neighborhoods cocooned in invisible electronic walls. As technology replaces trust, the system locks down further.

Fear paralyzes a population raised to handle weapons. People arm themselves to death to "defend themselves against the niggers," as a Michigan family told me. I still can't decide which is worse: that angry children can kill for a dollar, or that millions feel justified in killing to protect a TV.

Even teachers are assaulted before their students. My friend Jerry— mentioned in the Detroit letter page 183—learned not to intervene when his students polished guns in class. I often lectured to support his work, but when the only student he managed to get into Harvard was killed in class by stray bullets just before graduation, Jerry gave up and fled to over to me in Copenhagen.
His refuge was brief. Within a few years, gang wars among marginalized youths erupted here too, driving Scandinavians into their own flight from non-white citizens.

More cars, guns, fortresses, and military buildups mean higher corporate profits and deeper erosion of social cohesion. The more distance Tech-billiardares today create between us with their social media platforms, the more empathy drains away—and the higher the stock prices rise.

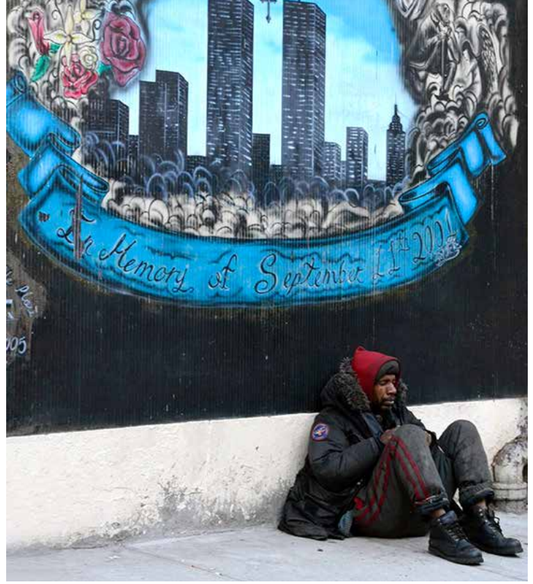
Slowly we grow desensitized and learn to justify even the sight of this hungry, exposed woman standing before the New York Stock Exchange. We have become masters at rationalizing poverty and absolve ourselves of responsibility for it.

1974 - Homeless outside Wall Street, the stock exchange, NY, and stockbroker inside

2006 - NYC

2007 - NYC

2003 - Portland, OR



2010 - NYC – Homeless at 9/11 Memorial at construction site of the new WTC

"I'm not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color.. ....When there's significant change, and I feel that flag represents what it's supposed to represent, I'll stand."" - Colin Kaepernick, American football player and activist

"The flag is drenched with our blood. Because, you see, so many of our ancestors were killed for it. We have earned the right to stand under that flag." — James Baldwin

"If we are truly a great nation, the truth cannot destroy us." — Nikole Hannah-Jones

"Sorry, America, but I will not be your soldier / Obama just wasn't enough – I need some more closure." - Joey Bada$$ (hiphop-protest singer)

"I sing America. I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen When company comes, But I laugh, And eat well, And grow strong." — Langston Hughes

"Oh say does that star-spangled banner yet wave / O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave" - Whitney Houston's recording of "he Star Spangled Banner" released after September 11th

2002 - NYC - 9/11 Memorial in devastated area of Harlem

1975 - San Diego, CA

1972 - Miami Beach, FL at the Republican Convention

1975 - Harlem, NY

1973 - NYC

1974 - Jersey City, NJ - Statue of Liberty

1974 - Jersey City, NJ - Statue of Liberty

The ghetto within us - the vision from a closed society

"Fear of black people is so deeply embedded in the American consciousness that it is invisible, like the air we breathe." - bell hooks

Attempts by the dominant caste to secure freedom and safety often end up mirroring the desperate measures of the ghetto. Just as those trapped there seek escape through awe-inspiring cars or violence, we answer civil unrest with soldiers in armored vehicles instead of changing the attitudes that created the ghetto – not least under Trump.

And how free are we in "God's own country" when so many see the Statue of Liberty from behind gated windows? For a century her torch was blind to those condemned by Jim Crow, quickly replaced by Big Brother's surveillance—another product of dehumanization coded into law.

Wandering the U.S. as a vagabond only five years after Jim Crow, I saw the country closing in on itself through constant searches by plainclothes police, even in the smallest towns.

Today the situation is far worse. The racial profiling I faced as a lecturer—driving at night with my Black assistant, Tony Harris, and having to show my book to anxious, armed police to prove that we were not a threat —has grown into a vast digital dragnet. No explanation is needed; the machine has already judged you. You are monitored without knowing it.

With companies like Palantir, Trump's oligarchic government harvests data from hospitals, schools, welfare and housing files, immigration records, and social media to build AI threat profiles of ordinary citizens.

These systems target not only violent criminals but parents seeking food aid, protesters exercising free speech, asylum seekers, students, and even my ability to give constitutionally protected university lectures. Algorithms trained on decades of biased data now label entire communities as dangerous long before any crime.

Drones patrol neighborhoods, facial recognition marks suspects from afar, and cell phones reveal our every move. These tools do not end racism—they automate it.

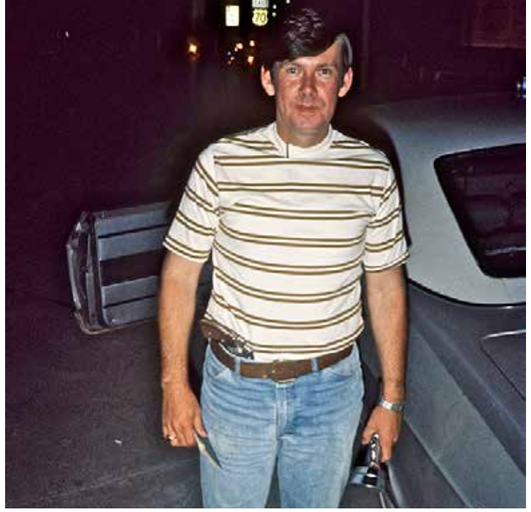
The fear that once justified stop-and-frisk now drives a data-industrial complex punishing the poor, the dark-skinned, the undocumented, the politically inconvenient, and anyone who dares dissent.

The ghetto is no longer just a place—it is a digital net cast over anyone who fails to fit the model. This is not security; it is a digital caste system. And we, the dominant caste, built it—out of fear and apathy—until the monster we created turns on us and eats our own freedom.

"When we fail to invest in our communities and create opportunities for all, we sow the seeds of violence and despair. We must work together to build a society where everyone has a chance to thrive." —President Obama

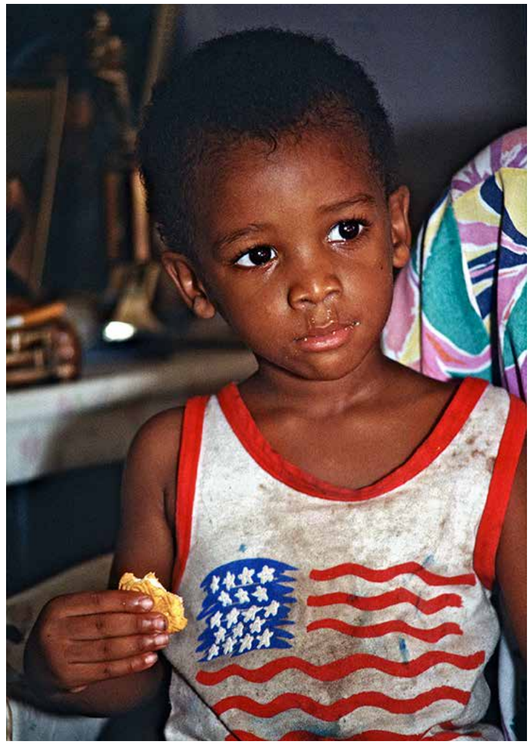
1974 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Baltimore



1974 - Richmond, VA. Plain clothes cop checking me

1986 - Amherst, MA



1975 - Philadelphia, MS

1972 - Jackson, MI - Family “defending ourselves against the niggers”, as they said, while I lived with their daughter in a mostly black area

1971 - Oakland, CA. BPP chairman Huy P. Newton

Later BPP Chairman Elaine Brown who sings the last song in this book

The People Who Would Not Bow

1973 - Baltimore. BPP Free Breakfast Program

"I am not a slave. I am a man. I have a right to the fruits of my labor." - Nat Turner, started the largest slave rebellion

"We had to be more than fighters. We had to be teachers, we had to be mothers, we had to be healers." - Elaine Brown, Black Panther leader who sings last song in this book

Yet no matter how formidable the oppression seems, there has always been a movement to oppose it—from Nat Turner's rebellion to Black Lives Matter. I couldn't passively watch the destruction, so I joined the movement of my generation, the Black Panthers. They had mastered political theater, exercising their Second Amendment rights to carry arms to protest endless police killings of Blacks. Whites were so frightened by armed Blacks that Governor Reagan, with NRA support (incredible as that sounds today), tightened California gun laws. Though the Panthers were otherwise nonviolent, the FBI launched its secret COINTELPRO program to destroy them, assassinating countless members, some in their sleep like Fred Hampton.

I was especially moved by the Free Breakfast for Children program in many ghettos. Hitchhiking around, I helped where I could. In Baltimore I stayed with my Panther friends Henry and Ilane (seen here with their baby beneath Huey Newton's poster), helping feed local children who walked long distances in rags to get a meal.

This felt more meaningful than joining the cult surrounding the mercurial leader Huey Newton, whom I met often in Oakland, along with other leaders such as Elaine Brown, who sings "There Is a Man" at the end of my show.

When David DuBois became editor of the Panther paper, he convinced me that my real contribution was as a photographer. I was proud to work under the son of W. E. B. Du Bois, shown here in the Oakland headquarters with the great cartoonist Emory Douglass. The photos in this book were first published in The Black Panther.

Henry and Ilane at poster of Huey P. Newton

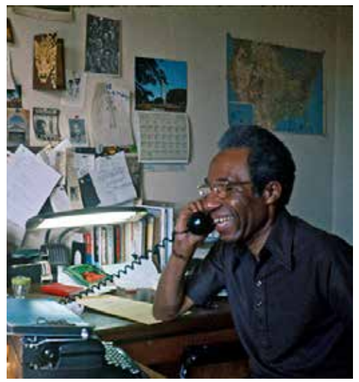
1975 - Seattle, WA

"We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire, but we say you put fire out best with water. You don't fight racism with racism. We're gonna fight racism with solidarity." ...."The real danger is not that white people are going to kill us; The real danger is that they will kill us and turn it into a suicide." - Fred Hampton, BPP-lader murdered by police

There is a sad afterword: When reviewing the film The Butler on Danish TV in 2013, I broke down in tears during the scene that, for the first time, portrayed the Panthers positively—as a natural stage in Black resistance. I realized how I had suppressed my Panther involvement. Starting my show in Reagan's America in 1984, I erased all traces of it, afraid of being branded a terrorist.

Much has changed in the country—and in me—since I met Reagan in 1972 and accused him of oppressing Blacks. He was the first major candidate since the civil rights era to rely on coded racism and dog-whistling ("jungle" = ghetto, "monkies" = Africans).

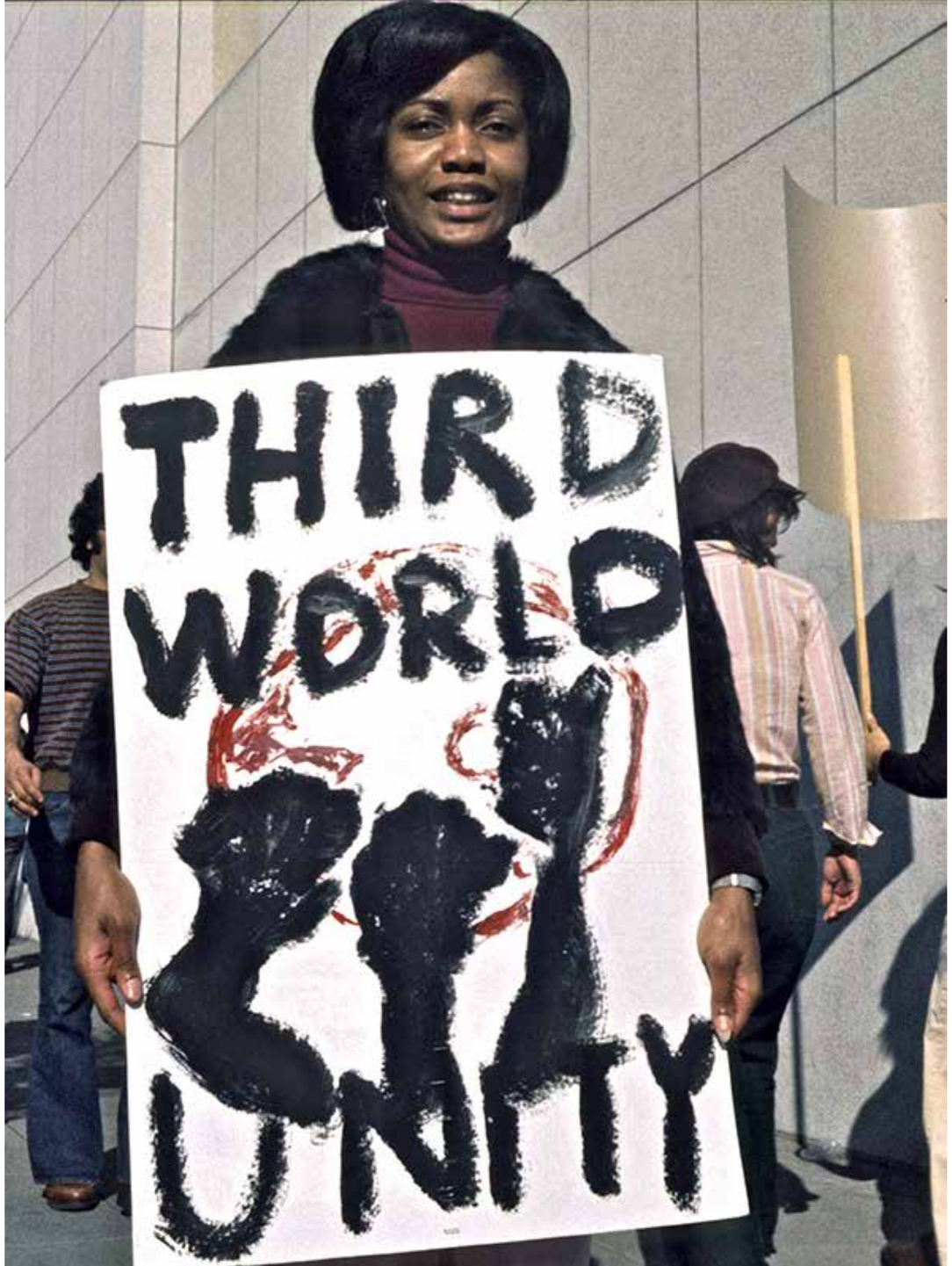
1971 - Oakland - BPP-activist Ericka Huggins

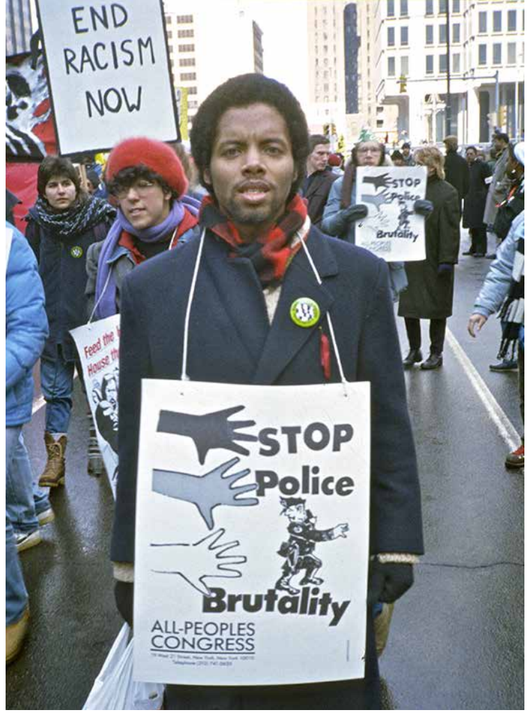


1974 - David Dubois in Oakland headquarters

1973 - Baltimore. BPP Free Breakfast

1974 -Emory Douglass in BPP headquarters





Left 1975 - San Francisco - Top 1991 - Philadelphia, PA

1987 - Ann Arbor, MI - Below: 1991 - Philadelphia, PA

Both from 1971 - Washington, DC.

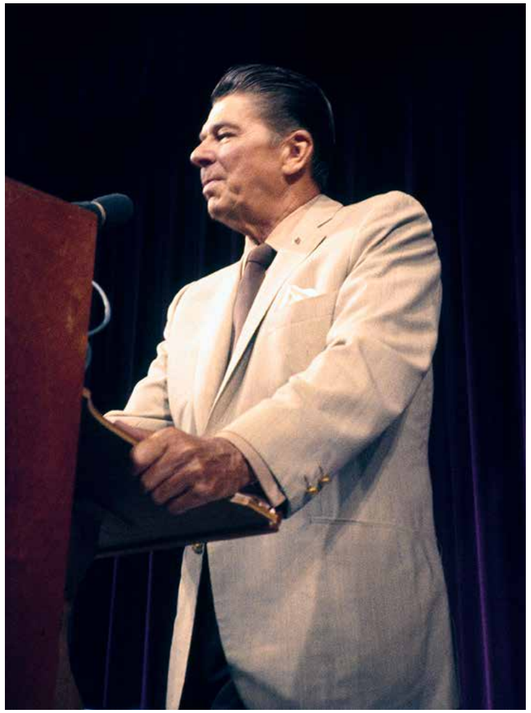
"We had to be armed because we were dealing with an armed and violent government. Our stance was a stance of defense against oppression." – Elaine Brown, Black Panther, who armed against Reagan's police

I joined Blacks in countless demonstrations—from Black Panther–sponsored events to Black Lives Matter protests—but never saw as many mobilized as when they rose against Reagan's double-edged racism: his color-coded Southern strategy at home and his support for South African apartheid abroad. He even harmed women globally by advocating dictator Zia to impose Sharia law in Pakistan.

I came to see that Blacks, like Martin Luther King, had always appealed to the good in the oppressor. But during the Reagan years I sensed, especially in the apartheid-like segregation of universities, that we who believed ourselves the "good guys"—whites, Jews, Muslims, immigrants, even Black immigrants—formed a kind of multicultural upper caste, unconsciously helping to ghettoize our stigmatized victims at "the Black tables." Thus, I shared Black frustration at demonstrating against people who, like Reagan, were basically good at heart, as his epitaph claims, yet whose actions reopened old wounds.

I am (rear right) photographing a Black Lives Matter demo in 2015 i Wash. DC

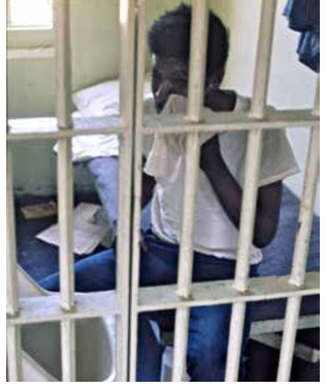
1971 - Washington, DC.



1972 - During my quarrels with Ronald Reagan, Miami Beach, FL

2013 - At his memorial grave I finally found something Reagan and I could agree on - and reconciled with him

BLM demo in Wash DC 2015



1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA

1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA

Mass Incarceration - The Yoke We Refuse to See

"We must face the reality that, as a nation, we have turned our backs on a new generation of children — our children — who have been locked up and locked out of mainstream society. The system of mass incarceration is slavery's second cousin once removed." - Michelle Alexander, author of The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

Oppression breaks human beings far more often than it breaks patterns. And if we don't understand those too wounded to resist, how will we grasp the destruction our racism causes?

These prisoners DID resist, not out of hunger but out of uncontrollable rage—a toxic blend of hatred and self-hatred that made them despise everything. Their anger is the most visible symptoms of oppression but shared by most Black Americans.

Their anger undermines their actions, causing them to stumble where others succeed. Instead of confronting the source of their anger, we blame them for their failures.

We don't understand the ghetto monster we created; instead, we turn our backs and "mass incarcerate" it in vast gulags—while corroding our own society.

My journey through this social jungle led me to prison, the most closed system of all, where I now saw the young men who had assaulted me five years earlier. Society had tightened its grip on them, and through my own years in the ghetto, I now felt connected to their fury.

Their "freedom" was an illusion; their choices were shaped by a system built to control, where "the pattern of life is already set" ("Ship Ahoy").

Many, like Michelle Alexander, argue that mass incarceration is a comprehensive system of racialized social control—eerily like Jim Crow of the past, a racial caste system where blacks disproportionately are subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives (far more than under South African apartheid).

The prison-industrial complex has become a lucrative industry where private companies and remote communities profit from caging millions and fund politicians to keep incarceration rates high.

The system reaches far beyond prison walls, affecting families and entire communities. Former inmates face a hidden world of legalized discrimination—denied voting rights, juries, housing, jobs, education, and public services.

This traps many in a cycle of poverty and criminalization, condemning them to permanent pariah status.

Previous liberal reforms that poured billions into slum rebuilding or education never dismantled this system; they only reinforced inmates' anger and deepened their humiliation. That is why liberals faltered when facing conservative policies like Clinton's "three strikes." Racism can't be bought off.

A profit-driven justice system discards lives. Ninety-five percent of funding goes to punishment, only five percent to paternalistic "rehabilitation." Most leave prison more broken, plagued by shame, rape trauma, and re-incarceration. Millions suffering from the psychological wounds of poverty, violence, and lead exposure are criminalized instead of treated.

Black Americans are 13% of the population but nearly half of all prisoners and receive twice the sentences of whites for the same offenses.

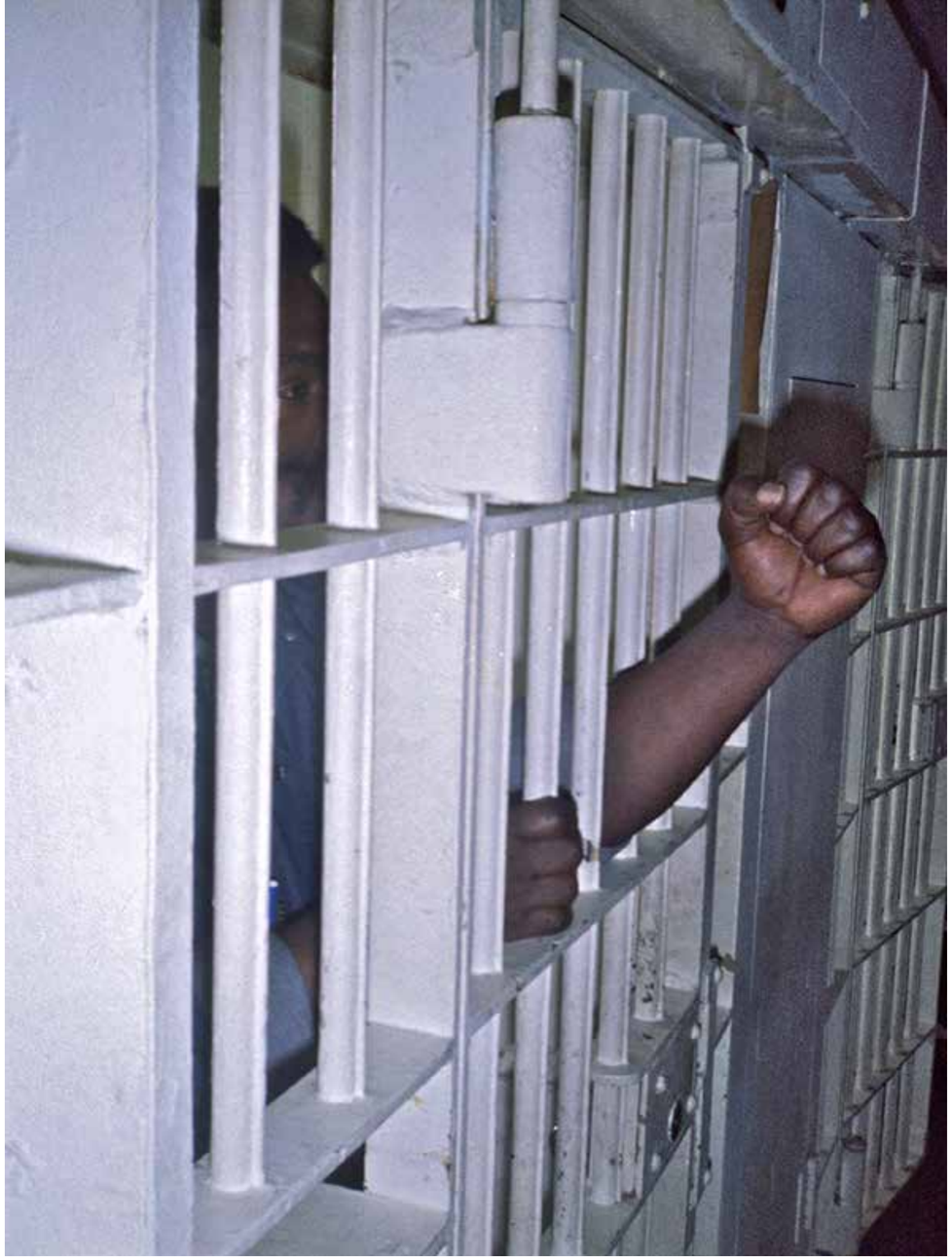
Alexander's portrayal of mass incarceration as a caste system—slavery's modern cousin—resonates deeply. It is an elaborate system of racism masked as "colorblindness."

1973 - NYC - Below 1973 - Baltimore

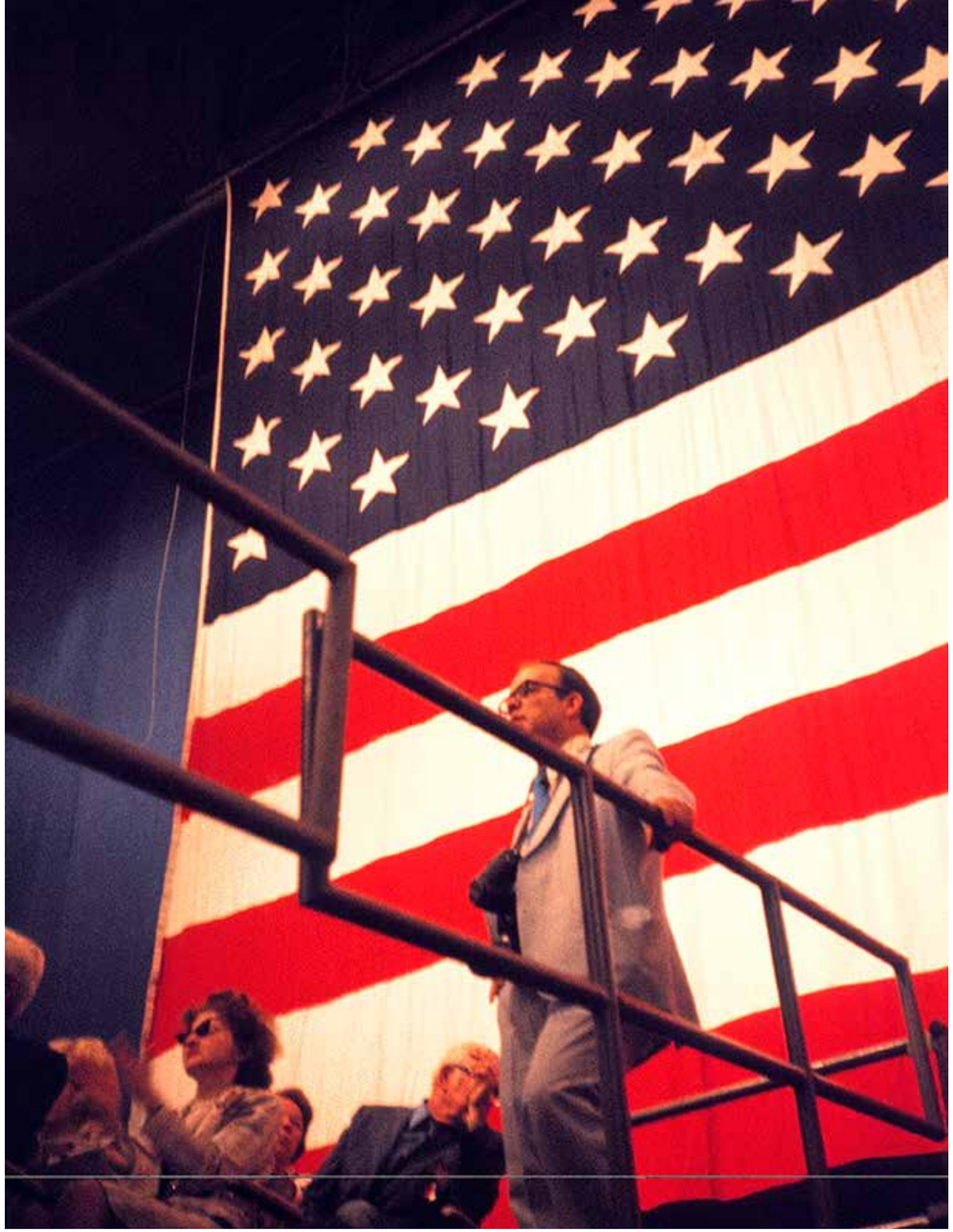
The deeper question is whether we are willing to confront our own role in sustaining this oppression. How do we dismantle a system thriving on denial? The far lower incarceration rate of West Indian immigrants points to the long shadow of internalized oppression unique to descendants of American slavery.

If the shattered lives and apathetic faces in these pages make us uneasy, it is because they expose a truth we must face: the horrors of this system demand collective responsibility. Until we recognize this and act, the cycle will continue—and devour future generations.

1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA

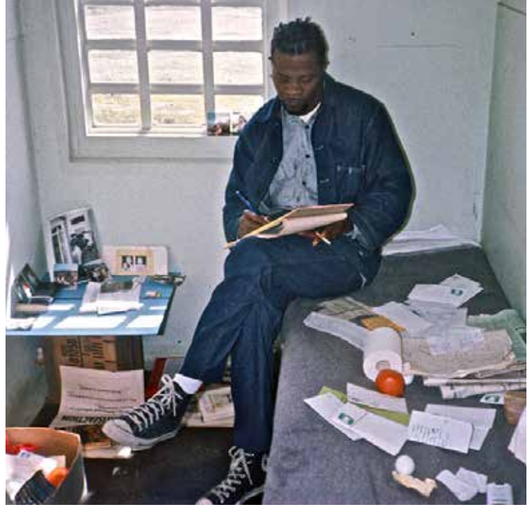


1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA



1972 - Miami Beach, FL

1975 - Popeye in San Bruno Jail, CA



1975 - Popeye writing for the Prisoners Union Paper

1975 - Popeye in visiting room

Right: 1975 - San Francisco

From Vagabond to Activist: How Popeye Jackson Changed My Life

"The fire that burned in the '70s is still alive in our hearts and minds. We are the children of the movement, and we will carry the torch forward." - Brittany Packnett Cunningham, activist during police murder in Ferguson, MO

"The movement for Black lives is not new. It is as old as America itself. We are carrying the torch of those who came before us, and we will continue to fight for justice until Black lives are truly valued." —Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

Thanks to their constitutional right to protest (in an increasingly unfree world), many Americans still see their country as the freest of societies—despite its barred windows and deserted streets.

A book like this may even be welcomed because the system is so massive in its oppression that criticism becomes entertainment.

Only when the system meets organized resistance does it strike back, as I saw with my closest friend in California, Popeye Jackson.

By the time I met Popeye, I'd reached the end of my journey. As a vagabond, I loved the freedom to lose myself in individuals and naively believed I could stay free of racism. Now I saw that my vagabonding had been a kind of privileged white flight.

The conceptual framework I used to survive was only one truth; there were deeper, more spiritual ways of seeing people.

I felt I was exploiting suffering with my camera, and sensing my own growing racism made me sick.

Racism in a racist society is neither voluntary nor individual, and I knew I was more than just a racist; realizing I was part of it forced me to take responsibility rather than hide in shame.

Only by becoming a conscious "antiracist racist" could I help change the country I'd come to love. I loved America too much to simply watch its self-destruction while many friends went to prison for resisting, and I only took pictures without acting.

So I put the camera away and worked with Popeye, who proved that the victim is not helpless, but capable of resisting.

Proud of his ghetto roots, dressed like a hustler, he embodied the underclass with all its openness, violence, generosity, and contradictory beauty.

Popeye had himself been on a long journey. After entering jail at age ten and serving nineteen years, his political consciousness deepened. He felt that Marxism helped free him of the self-hatred prison produces.

Not as an intellectual escape, he turned it into practice by organizing other inmates into the United Prisoners Union, eventually becoming president.

He believed escape from the ghetto required collective change of the whole system. His reputation grew so much that he was chosen as mediator in the Patricia Hearst kidnapping.

As his influence on prison inmates rose, police tried to return him to prison by planting dope in his car and at times threatening his life. Working together in the UPU, we became more and more close. Seeing the holes in my shoes, he quietly gave me boots.

Although I had stopped photographing, he convinced me to take these pictures for the prison newspaper. After his death, I can now reveal that Sheriff Hongisto "jailed" me out of appreciation for my work in the gay movement, allowing me to smuggle in the camera.

Popeye worked relentlessly to organize inmates under conditions that crushed all private life to break people down.

As I myself was totally paralyzed in here, seeing him inspire men to read political literature amid the ever-present fear and constant noise left an indelible mark on me. Many inmates told me he'd changed them; he was not a "fake intellectual revolutionary" but one of their own.

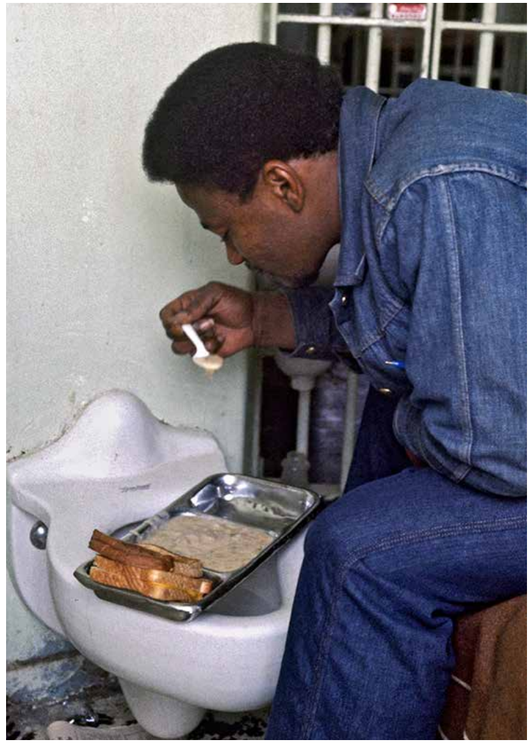
Yet Popeye was not without severe human failings that disturbed many volunteers, not least women in our group. They had learned from the naïve Left of the '60s, which had romanticized even rapists as revolutionary vanguards.

Some left because of Popeye's sexism. I clashed with them, seeing their critique as just another form of racism: a modern way of rejecting the underclass. "If you think a man can emerge from 300 years of slavery and 19 years of prison as an angel, you are fools. Even Martin Luther King was sexist," Coretta King says today."

And, "If you deny a man a powerful leadership until he meets every white liberal norm, you are as dangerous an enemy to affirmative action as any Southern racist."

Yet even as I defended him, I betrayed him too: just as whites rarely confront each other's racism, we men failed to challenge Popeye's sexism, if only so he could grow into a stronger organizer.

All from 1975 - San Bruno County jail, CA



The TV news announcing Popeye's murder in my slide-show

The Betrayer in Our Midst

"No justice, no peace. We chant it, we scream it, we live it. We cannot live in a country where Black people are hunted and killed with impunity." —Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act." - George Jackson, prison activist killed by police

Outside the prison, a strong campaign finally won Popeye's release, and we threw a big "back in the world" party for him. Popeye had often warned me about FBI infiltrators posing as UPU members, but trusting everyone from my vagabond years, I dismissed it as ghetto paranoia.

I couldn't imagine anyone in our circle being secret police—until I saw what the system did to Popeye's union.

One of the people I trusted most was an FBI informant.

Her name was Sara Jane Moore. Older than the rest of us, she seemed like a confused but sympathetic suburban housewife. It stunned us when she confessed in the newspapers that she had spied for the FBI but had been converted to Popeye's beliefs.

1975 - Popeye at our "back in the world" release party

Two months later she nearly changed world history when she attempted to assassinate President Ford in Union Square. Tormented by guilt over what she'd done for the FBI, she wanted revenge on the "head of the system," as she put it.

Billy, my neighbor where I lived with transvestites, knocked the gun from her hand and saved the president's life. He was invited to the White House, but Billy was dating the leader of the gay movement, Harvey Milk's lover, Joe, and the White House rescinded the invitation when Milk made him openly confess he was gay. (In 2007, after 32 years in prison, Sara Jane was released, and film and TV companies contacted me for my photos of her.)

What had happened to throw her so off balance? Only days after our party, Popeye was to come over to choose pictures for our prison paper. He called me to say he had a meeting instead. I planned to join him there later and drive home with him. Two hours before leaving, I received a terrified call from Annie, crying in fear, begging me not to go home with Popeye. If I hadn't received that call, I wouldn't have seen the next night's news:

"This is the eleven o'clock Eyewitness News. San Francisco police continue their investigation into the execution-style slaying of prison reformer Popeye Jackson, head of the United Prisoners Union. Jackson was sitting in a car with Sally Voye, a schoolteacher from Vallejo, when the shooting took place at 2:45 Sunday morning. Police say they died immediately."

And then—without pause—the screen changed:

"Now, like many of you, I love dogs. That's why I feed my dogs Alpo... meat is a dog's natural food... not a speck of cereal...."

1975 - Local TV News next evening

Then the news cut back:

"Reports indicate the gunman fired through the window. The first bullet hit Miss Voye, the second Jackson. There are no signs of robbery—wallets untouched. It appears to be an execution-style slaying."

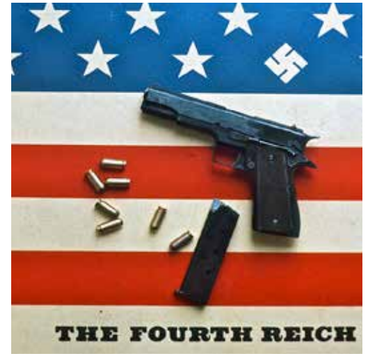
And again, instantly, the next commercial:

"You see someone take that first bite and you've just got to try it yourself. In this world there's only one fried chicken that always tastes so finger lickin' good...."

For a Dane unused to commercials—especially in moments of death—the brutality of the contrast felt obscene. It was as if Popeye's life and murder were just another program interruption between dog food and Kentucky Fried Chicken.

"The revolution will not be televised." —Gil Scott-Heron

"The revolution will not be live-streamed. The revolution will be in the streets. The revolution will be in the communities. The revolution will be in our hearts." —Alicia Garza



When the Prophet Fell

— Flawed, yes, but fighting a System Dehumanizing Us All

"It's time for us to humanize the narratives of Black people. We've been dehumanized in this country for too long." —Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

"The function, the very structure, of racism is to dehumanize people. And how can you negotiate with a dehumanized enemy? You can't." —James Baldwin

Although it was my best friend I saw lying in a pool of blood on TV—only hours after I myself had planned to drive home with him—I was unable to cry for four days. The whole thing felt unreal, delivered as it was through that American blend of dog-food and fried-chicken commercials. A system with media at its command can get away with anything when it can make us forget, in the next instant, what we saw in the last.

The reality didn't hit me until the funeral, when I totally broke down in tears. Then I also realized that Sally—who worked with prisoners and ghetto children while living in a safe suburb, who confronted Popeye's sexism, and whom I liked immensely—had also been murdered simply because she would have been a witness. My own fate would likely have been the same had I been with them that night.

Here she is with Popeye days before the killing. The assassin was never found. But after Sara Jane Moore—sentenced to life—described in Playboy the FBI threats she faced when they saw she was embracing Popeye's ideas, few of us doubted the origin of the murder. Popeye had warned me often about ex-convicts who cut early-release deals with the police. He himself was never afraid of dying, although the San Francisco Chronicle later revealed that police had threatened to kill him.

In his last article, written while I was with him in prison, he said: "We ought not to fear death. We are the convicted class, and only through revolution can we win our freedom and the freedom of all oppressed people."

At the funeral—where I was the only photographer invited by the family—his union brothers and prison friends of every color kissed him farewell. Many others would not be "back in the world" to see his tomb for a generation. His mother, who brought him cake every week for nineteen years, collapsed in grief before the coffin.


San Francisco Examiner

Few assassination clues

Who killed 'Popeye' Jackson?

SLA jury's 11th day-- no verdict

Livermore street gala ends in riot

CIA called a danger to the people

Rocky's report

Ford takes to TV in furor over CIA

1975 - The Hearst-papers SF Examiner


'Popeye' Jackson-- who executed him?

By Larry D. Hatfield

'POPEYE' JACKSON

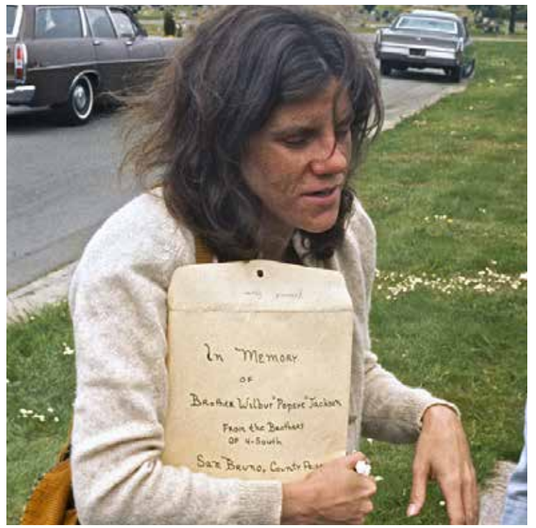
SALLY VOYE

and SF Chronicle

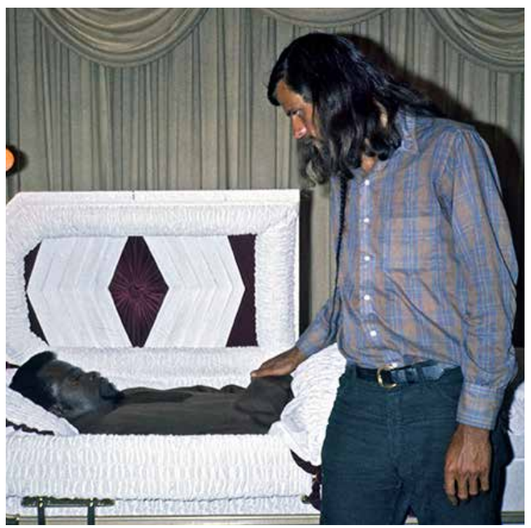

1975 - Popeye at our party

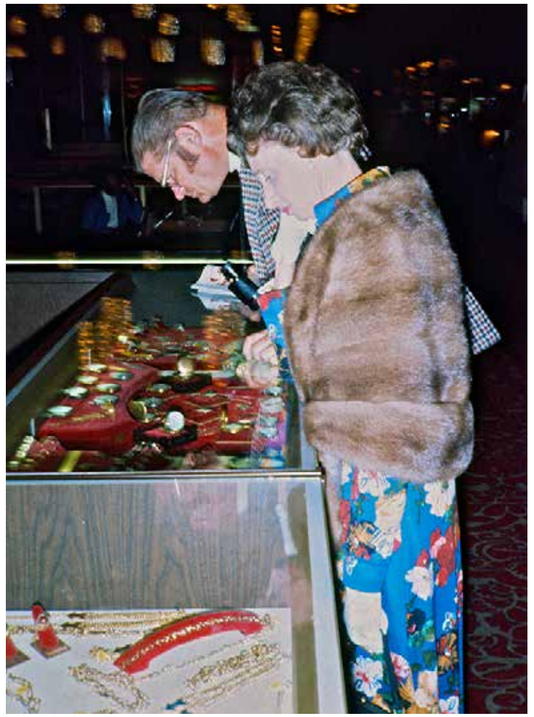

1975 - UPU member "Sleepy" at the funeral


1975 - Popeye and Sally Voye at party



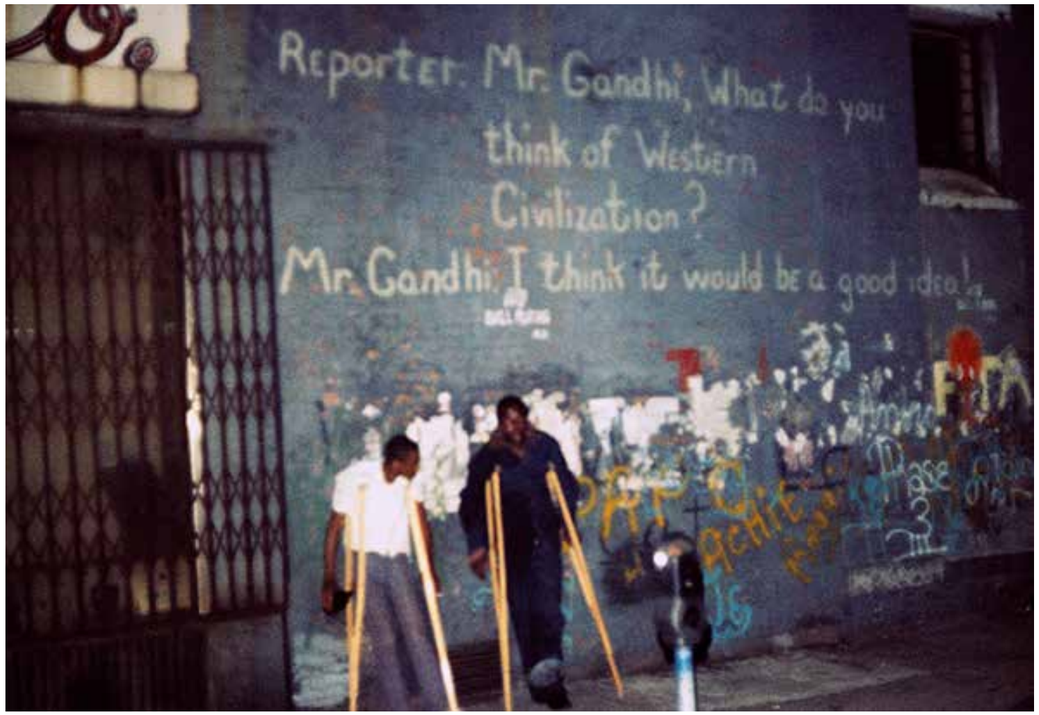
1975 - Popeye's pregnant wife Pat Singer at funeral





1975 - guests at 5000$ a plate fundraising dinner for President Ford

1975 - Ex-convict saying goodbye



1971 - Two Veterans at Gandhi memorial, Lower Eastside, NY

There is a man
who stands in all our way.
And his greedy hands
reach out across the world.
But if we slay this man
we will have peace in this land
and this glorious struggle
will be done.

And what we want is just to have
what we need
and to live in peace with dignity.
But these few old men,
no they won't break or bend
so it's only through their death
that we'll be free.

And if we dare to fight
for what, for what we want
sparing none
who are standing in our way:
The fight is hard and long
but we can't, we can't go wrong,
for our liberation will be won.

And we can meet again
if we do not die
for that is the price
that might be paid,
But if we pass this way
we shall meet some day,
we shall meet again
if we do not die ...

Elaine Brown, Black Panther Chairman, seen her speaking in 1973 - Oakland, CA

Listen to the song here by Elaine Brown illustrated in my slideshow

1971 – a corpse opposite Gandhi's memorial wall

Lament for a Land I Had Come to Love

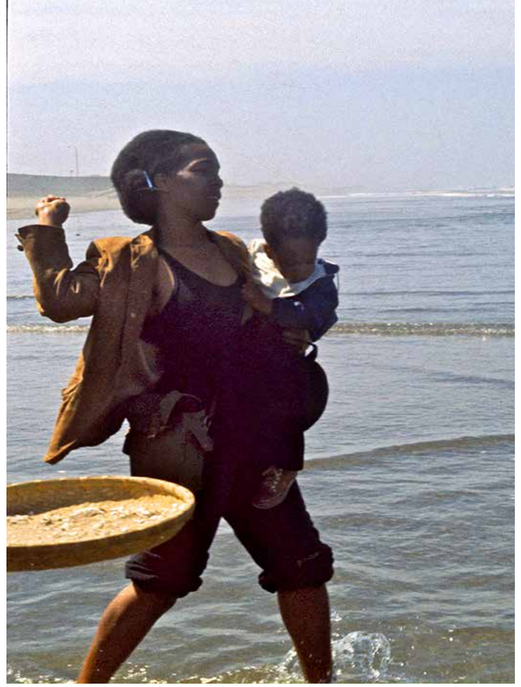
"Sometimes you have to give up on people, not because you don't care, but because they don't care." —Tupac Shakur

Popeye was the last friend I wanted to lose this way. With the murders of Sally and Popeye, all my senses had been killed.

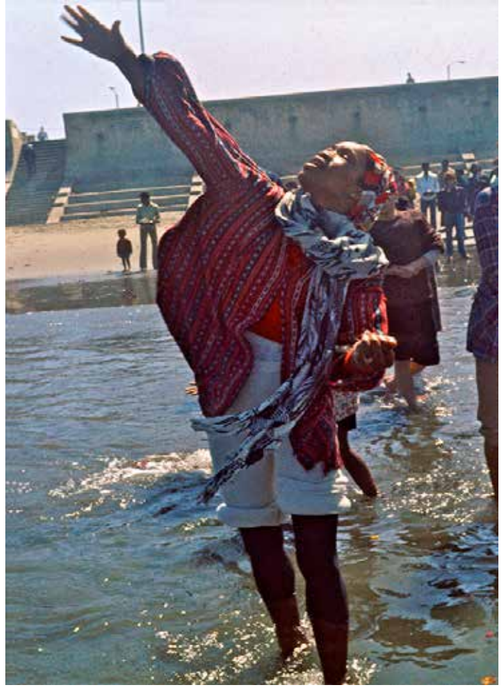
I couldn't take it anymore and fled the country. I had lost twelve of my closest friends to America's senseless violence, and many others had vanished into prison for life.

This man was murdered in New York near where I lived, right across from a ghetto mural (behind the shroud) he may never have noticed or been able to read. Late one evening at that same wall, we find two crippled veterans who had once defended "Western civilization" and now begged in the streets.

"I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually." — James Baldwin



1975 - San Francisco. Linda Jones throwing ashes in the ocean



1975 – San Francisco. Rhodessa Jones throws away the ashes. The following year, she saw herself in my slide show in Copenhagen

"O, let America be America again—The land that never has been yet—And yet must be—the land where every man is free."
—Langston Hughes

I ended my first trip to the U.S. with the tear-filled pathos of my original slideshow:

I loved the American people more than anything I had known and wanted eventually to become part of them with no intention of leaving.

The human warmth I'd encountered everywhere—like that which had once welcomed earlier immigrants—was a fresh breeze after the detachment I'd known in Europe.

But this warmth and openness stood in stark contrast to the cruel, inhuman ghetto system that had grown out of Americans' own unacknowledged pain, often rooted in wounds from childhood onward.

I had stood on America's highest peaks and in its deepest shadowy depths, with one foot in the grave. Everywhere it hurt me to see the increasing fortification of this openness, a warmth most foreign visitors still feel liberating, but which has hardened into fear, hatred, and bitterness toward fellow Americans.

Today they are so alienated from each other they scarcely dare speak about politics or race, even in their own families. In this cold civil war, they isolate themselves in echo chambers and segregated neighborhoods.

And so the violence continues—against the oppressed at home and across the world. Through climate racism and unjust trade policies, we kill or drive millions of the world's "your tired, your poor" to our shores as refugees. But how many do we reject simply because we fear the deeper change in ourselves that would ultimately heal our societies and benefit our children?

Yet another child has been killed in ghetto violence—a five-year-old. The circle closes again. Once more a Black mother must cast her child into the ocean, as mothers did from slave ships 500 years ago—the lifespan of our ghetto system.

The ocean will lead her back to the shores her ancestors came from when we needed them.
How much more suffering will we witness—or cause?
We don't know. We cast our uncertainty into the ocean along with the ashes of our victims.

The end of the slideshow with *Ship A'hoy* by The O'Jays

Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy!
As far as your eye can see,
men, women and baby slaves,
coming to the land of Liberty,
where life's design is already made –
So young and so strong
they're just waiting to be saved ...

The End? - From Oppression to Empathy: A Journey Toward Healing

The end of my slideshow

"Forgiveness is the willingness to give up the hope of a better past. " -Toni Morrison

"History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again." -Maya Angelou

"We are all interconnected, and the pain of one becomes the pain of all. We must learn to heal together, or we will all suffer." - Yaa Gyasi

"Healing begins where the wound was made." - Alice Walker, The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart

"If we're gonna heal, we gotta feel. And we can't heal if we're afraid." –Beyoncé

American students were asked to write down their feelings after five hours of "reverse oppression" in my slideshow—that is, having their self-image as decent and morally responsible consistently contradicted.

These are typical results:

Guilty, paranoid, frustrated, drained, upset, numb, tense, angry, pissed, silenced, dumb, confused, unworthy, cautious, inferior, powerless, fearful, meek, passive...

Further oppression could also have made you:

protective, inattentive, hostile, turned off, shrewd, playing games, deceitful, plotting, manipulative, retaliatory, superior, observant (of the oppressor), crafty, destructive, detached, cagy...

These are almost the same sentiments expressed by most Blacks living under patterns of oppression in the U.S. and South Africa, by Muslim immigrants in Europe, by Palestinians living under Israeli domination, and—at varying degrees—by many other oppressed people, often ending in violence.

The pain, anger, and sadness that summarize these feelings force people into paralysis, into hopeless and self-consuming rage. The irrational and impotent behavior that follows further reinforces the racism of the oppressor.

The sudden realization of how this vicious cycle works motivated many university students to work together to break these patterns.

Many felt the urge to cry and to share their feelings. Sharing our fears and deep concerns about racism in constructive dialogue, I believe, is a meaningful first step toward breaking free from the inhibitions that keep us locked in destructive roles.

Many readers of this book will undoubtedly oppose systemic racism—the sum of all our individual racisms—but I hope they will also take the further step of confronting their own.

Oppressing people into a new way of thinking in order to liberate others was not my own invention. I was inspired by the progressive government programs initiated after Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma, which sought to change oppressive white thinking because only the reduction of white prejudice could reduce oppression and create upward mobility for Blacks. In other words, it was necessary to forcibly initiate an upward spiral.

One beneficiary of these programs was my mentor, Dr. Charles King, who was employed by the U.S. government to lead "White people must change" seminars for employees in the military, CIA, FBI, and major corporations.

After seeing my show, he invited me to observe one of his seminars. Without warning the participants, he spent two days abusing, dividing, accusing, and pitting them against one another—demonstrating what systemic oppression feels like from the inside.

1986 - With Dr. Charles King after one of his workshops - hear him below

1991 - With my mentor on his deathbed in Atlanta a few days before his death

As a white observer, I often felt he went too far and pitied these highly educated, well-intentioned participants, who had agreed not to leave.

Yet with formidable insight into Black and white psychology, I watched him gradually break them down.

At the end, he revealed predictions he had written about how each participant would respond—who would withdraw, who would fight back, who would submit.

Then he asked them to list their feelings. They were nearly identical—to one another's, and to mine.

He ended by saying: "Those are the feelings we Blacks carry every day because of white racism. But now I will stop oppressing you. Do you trust me?" None of us did.

Yet he kept his promise and ended with a liberation celebration that released an overwhelming gratitude I had never witnessed before. People felt lifted into freer thinking.

Later, he introduced me as "the only modern-day John Brown," and I often since took students to Harper's Ferry, where Brown began his abolitionist uprising.

Charles King was the first to make me understand that the emotions produced by his oppression were the same as those created by American Pictures. This is why I stretched my program over two days: first confrontation, then healing.

His powerful approach failed on college campuses because students unlike his "locked up" government employees could walk out. But images and music held mine "captive" and "shell shocked" for five hours, after which they committed to a second day of dialogue.

Slowly, often under the influence of my Black assistant Tony Harris, silence turned into the first honest Black–white conversations many had ever experienced on campus. When that happened, Tony and I would quietly leave and begin again elsewhere.

Usually, they would bring us back within a year to their "American Pictures Unlearning Racism" groups. Often I would be invited back 20 years later when these students met again to evaluate how American Pictures had changed their lives.

So "oppressing" us into confronting our own oppressive thinking—so we can meet one another at eye level in dialogue—is the most effective method I have witnessed for healing racism, also used by countless other anti-racism counselors whose workshops have inspired me over the years.

The only approach I have seen that works even better is moving in with those we fear. Whenever I brought students, foreigners, or even KKK members into the ghettos, fear and guilt dissolved as well as deep-rooted anger and hostility patterns among the ghetto dwellers. This cannot be learned in safe, intellectual settings alone.

Left Dr. Charles King's workshop
Right my own workshop in U.Penn 1991

Centered around Zindzi Mandela in our Ubuntu House we are celebrating the humanity we share across all ethnic, religious, sexual, and national borders

When, after the first years I learned—through the help of others—to overcome my own fear and distrust of fellow citizens and saw how they now opened up to me, I found a poem by Nis Petersen that challenged me to open up further.

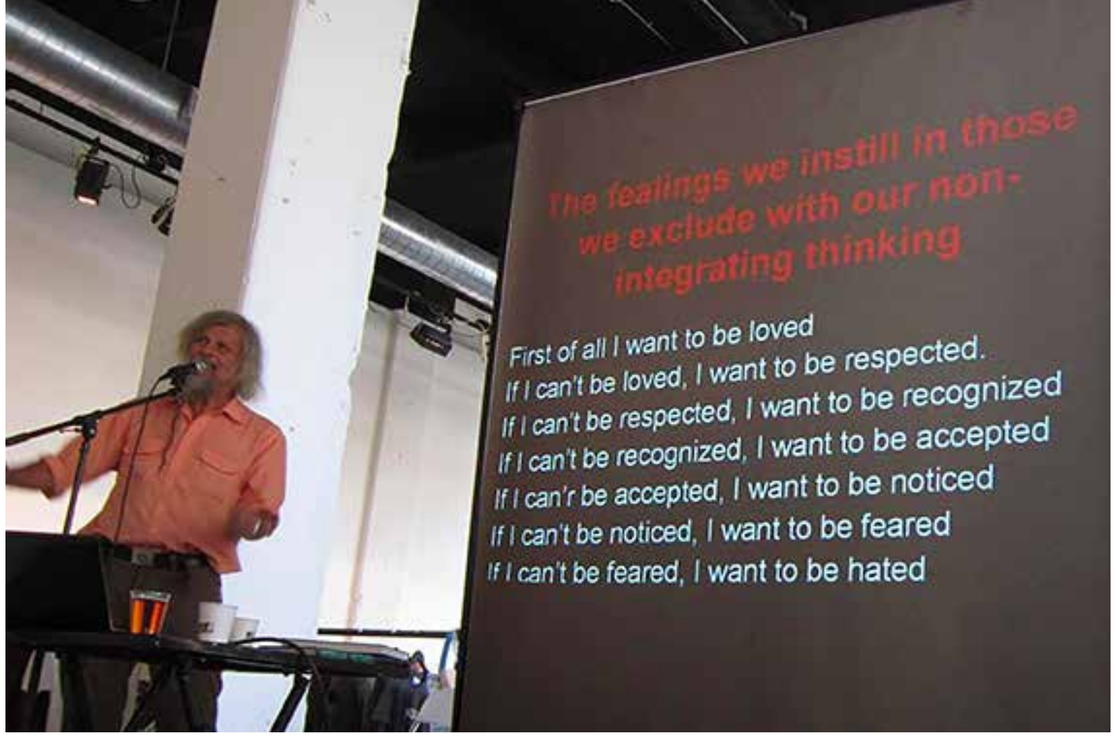
I illustrated it with my photos and carried it everywhere as an inspiration. It later became the introduction to all my lectures: "On saying yes to those we shun."

With love Jacob Holdt

Oppressors of the world, unite—
we have nothing to lose
but the illusions of our gains.

Patron of the Ubuntu House, Zindzi Mandela, daughter of Winnie and Nelson Mandela

Left: See Zindzi Mandela speak in the Ubuntu House on Women's day
Right: See my farewell speech to her shortly before her death



2012 New York Photo Festival. My lecture "On saying yes to those we shun" Photo Susanne Gupta

Lovest Thou Man ?

Man came towards me
– heavily – painfully –
behind him the path
with slimy tracks
of lies and festering sores -.
A voice boomed: Lovest thou Man?
No! I said – I can't.
Love! Said the voice.
Man came –
nearer – crawling –
drooling of lust –
with flies and vermin
in the sores of his belly.

Hammered the voice :
- Lovest thou Man ?
No ! I said.
Love! said the voice.
Nearer – and slowly nearer –
inch by inch –
the stench was heavy
from Lie's thousands of diseases –
and the voice threatened:
- Lovest thou Man ?
- No – I don't love !
- Love! Said the voice.

Then he rose to his feet –
and he stretched his hands towards me,
and lo: the spike wounds oozed red –
the naked arms were covered to the
shoulders with black sores of sin –
and the man laughed :
– Thus did God love !
A blindfold fell from my eyes –
And I shouted :
– Mand – I love you !
And my mouth was full of blood –
the blood of Man.
Nis Petersen