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 with American students have confirmed 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 the same students — like many whites — will say they wish to adopt Black children "so they can become just like us." They rarely see how much that reveals: that it is Black behavior we fear, judge, or want to correct. 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. Do we extend the equality we claim to believe in? Or do we retreat into the polite racism of avoidance — creating psychological or physical ghettos while insisting we harbor no prejudice?

In this part of the book, 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 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. 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.

1974 - NYC

1973 - NYC

1973 - flooding in the delta around Greenwood, MS

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 While Leaving Our Neighbors in the Dust

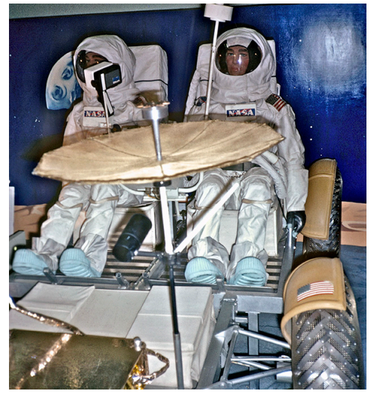
"I don't care about the moon. I care about the people who are suffering here on Earth. The moon is not going to solve our problems. We need to invest in education, health care, and social justice." — Kendrick Lamar

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

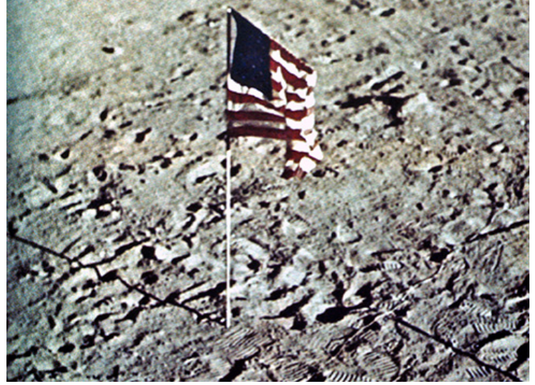
As America's oldest citizen, Charles Smith was invited as guest of honor at a moon-rocket launch.

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

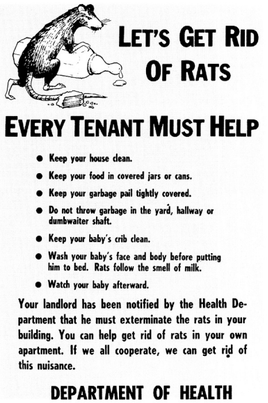
1973 - East Detroit

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: Sort baggrund her

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.

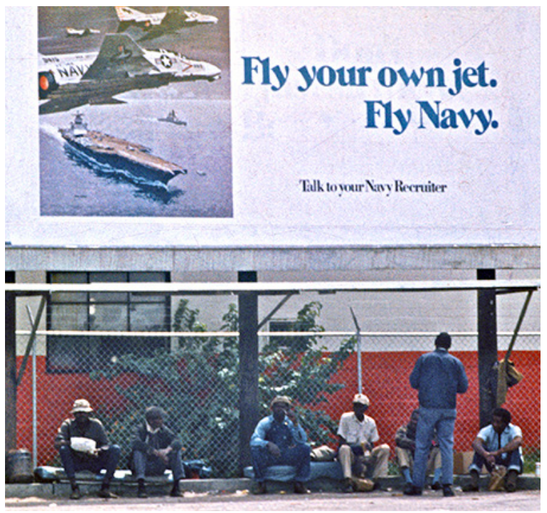
Our consumption traps us in a vicious circle of invented needs.

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).

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.

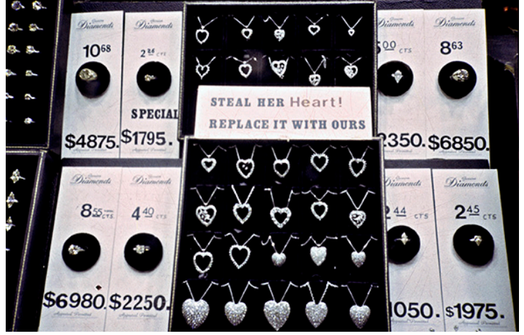
1991 - Bronx, NY

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. On 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 it most strongly this Christmas, even more intensely than last year when I was held up by three Puerto Ricans on Fourth Street on Christmas Eve.

This year I had just hitchhiked 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 lit 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 the ones who can only communicate through their eyes.

As we were sitting there talking, it naturally occurred to us that it was Christmas Eve, and we became more and more sentimental, and when we exchanged memories of our childhood Christmas Eves it wasn't just the smoke from the fire that brought tears to our eyes. He had been married, had children, and had actually been quite happy, he thought now, but had suddenly become unemployed, after which his family began to disintegrate and he became an alcoholic. We sat and 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 guy 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 so during the course of our conversation he kept returning to his indignation over these prostitutes who were out even on Christmas Eve. Whenever I have drunk heavily with bums they have fallen asleep first, even though we have been drinking the same amount. And he, too, fell asleep, around ten or eleven p.m.

I wondered a bit 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 afterwards quickly continue 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 a lot 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 that 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 taking the other one with him. Larry was more extroverted and eloquent, but I was white, so we figured that what one of us didn't have, the other could make up for.

But Larry was the type who had to rap with everybody in the street, no matter who they were. He had been in a respectable marriage for four years, but confided in me that the whole time he had really been a street person at heart. So we had not walked far before we had a whole flock of street people with us; most of them were bums. At one time there were five whom Larry had promised that he would surely find them a place to stay and a bottle of wine on top of that. Two of them walked on crutches. A third went around flailing the air as if he were swatting mosquitoes.

I was absolutely convinced that we could never find a place to sleep for this whole crowd, but since something unexpected always turned up in such crazy situations, I didn't say anything to Larry about it. We asked the few people we met if they knew of a place we could stay, but concentrated first and foremost on the Jews, as the others were celebrating Christmas, you see, and we therefore assumed that they did not have room in their hearts. Besides, Jews are traditionally the most hospitable. Since I was the only white, it was up to me to handle all the Jews, while the others kept a bit in the background. But all efforts were in vain. One person said that if it really was true that I was a foreigner he would be glad to take me home, but he dared not, so instead he gave me six dollars for the YMCA. Naturally we rushed off and bought a few bottles of apple wine with the money, and from then on things looked a bit brighter. But we were still unable to find any place to sleep, and the wine made the bums loud and aggressive, and the man swatting mosquitoes began shadowboxing at people, so that they fled in all directions.
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-

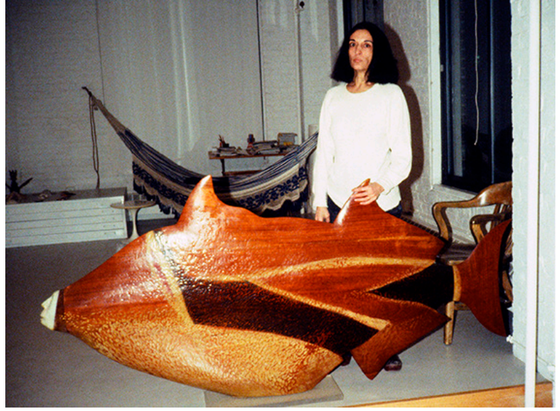
TV-movie from 1992 about my continuing friendship with the homeless in New York

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

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

1991 – NYC - Homeless cities on the Lower East Side

haired woman came over to me and stood for a long time staring into my eyes in a strange way. Then, very slowly, she said, "You have fish eyes." I thought that she was on some drug and tried to look away. Then she said, "I want you to come and live with me." I pulled myself together and asked whether I could bring a couple of my friends with me. She said no. "Then I can't come with you," I said, but she gave me her address anyway.

I then went on with the others for another couple of hours, but I couldn't get her out of my thoughts. The situation now looked completely hopeless for us. We were really plastered by this time. Over in the piles of corrugated cardboard on Mercer Street we had lost one of the guys on crutches, who had fallen asleep. As it was now raining heavily and I was almost unconscious, I slipped away from the others around five o'clock. I was very embarrassed about it, and during the next couple of days I felt very ashamed. But a week later I was lucky enough to run into Larry on Washington Square, and he told me that he, too, had left the others in the lurch and had found a huge fat white woman over in the West Village, where he lived now. That comforted me and we continued being good friends.

I myself had gone back to that strange woman. It turned out that 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 little palette-shaped swimming pool. All she wanted from me was that I should keep her company. For three days we sat from dawn to dusk staring into each other's eyes. Everywhere there were huge plaster fish; they hung on the walls and gaped foolishly down at us. But there was certainly more life in them than there was in her. For three days I tried desperately to talk with her. All I managed to get out of her was that she felt very lonely and that she had never lived with a man before. She was forty 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 twice been on the cover of Time Magazine and once on the cover of Look; but her last exhibition of fish sculptures had gotten bad reviews.

It turned out that 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 came out with an indirect hint.

"Did it ever occur to you that all your art is entirely for the rich folks, and isn't benefiting the 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 of checking to see if there was any food in it. I got a bit of a shock when several big cod-like frozen fish came tumbling out — and nothing else. If I had not been so hungry, I would probably have had a bit more patience with her.

Then suddenly came my rescuer wandering into this silence. It was Erica, who had previously helped Marisol polish the fish sculptures. She was laughing and happy, and it was fantastic to hear a human being again. She perceived my situation lightning quick, and as elegantly as a fish, seven dollars slipped into my hand under the table. Later she whispered to me that I could move in with her. When Marisol fell asleep that evening, I fled to Erica, who lived in a tiny miserable fire-escape apartment on 11th Street.

Erica, whom I am now living with, is quite simply a find. She is a lesbian, but without the animosity toward men that has characterized so many New York lesbians. It always makes me so happy when I can have a good relationship with a lesbian. Erica, like me, can't understand the necessity of hating men. It's certainly true, I feel, that both heterosexual and homosexual American men are alarmingly aggressive, but one must still try to understand the oppression and the society which 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've almost stopped doing it in Black homes, where it often embarrasses the women: they just 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?)

And 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. But what is shocking is how they are usually totally unable to deal with a non-aggressive man. After two or three days they usually say something like: "Have you always been gay?" Or more often, "Let's go out and get drunk." No doubt they would be uncomfortable if a new guest went right to their refrigerator and ate all their meat. Yet American women seemingly feel 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 in the bud any chance of building a more meaningful relationship with them.

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 now become my job to answer the telephone, sort out the obscene calls, and ask the nice ones to call again at 5 p.m. for a second sorting. She has an ad in the sex magazine Screw, which apparently all businessmen read, for the telephone rings nonstop. The finals start around 6 p.m. when I have to choose the very nicest voice and arrange a meeting in a hotel for 7 p.m. We then take a taxi up to the hotel, usually on 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 has not come down by then, I have to go up and knock at the door.

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

In the daytime she goes to singing lessons and dance classes or sits for hours making coffee services out of foam rubber. Every single cup, saucer, and spoon is perfect down to the smallest detail. She has several glass cupboards filled with foam-rubber china, as in the most respectable bourgeois homes. She is a fantastic inspiration for me. One day when a man had been mugged outside on the street and had been lying there for a long time, Erica was the only one who bothered to call an ambulance. But no ambulance came and people were just standing staring stupidly at the half-dead man. She kept telephoning. The thing is that there are only Puerto Ricans living there, so it usually takes up to an hour before police or ambulances arrive. Then she got the bright idea of calling the police and asking them to hurry

1973 - NYC

over because a white man was being attacked by several Blacks and Puerto Ricans right outside; two police cars and an ambulance came immediately. This trick is common in New York, but it seems to work every time. I have often seen Erica give a whole day's wages to people in need. She took the money directly from the rich businessmen in the hotels and gave it to some beggar on the street.

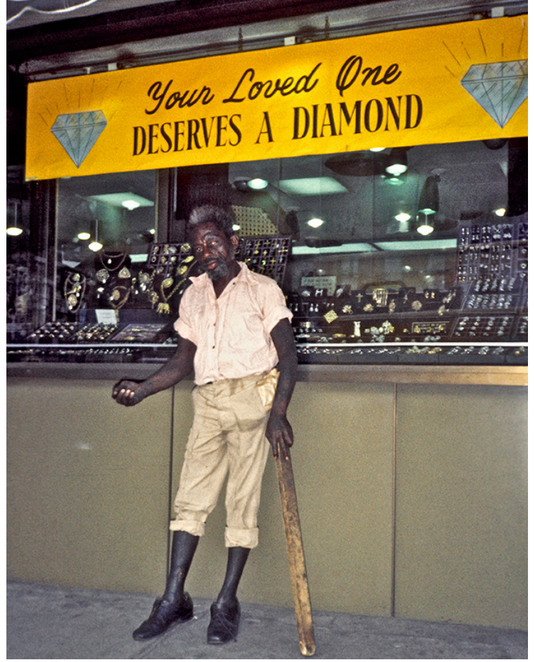
Another night she was even more fantastic. We were on our way to a movie when we saw a bum in his fifties sitting there asking for help to buy a bottle of wine, and for somebody to talk to. We sat and talked with him for a couple of hours over the wine, and he said he was about to have delirium tremens and was afraid he would die. Erica immediately said that we would go with him to the hospital, and he cried for joy. He had been waiting for this moment for ten years. He had never had the courage himself to go to the hospital. We took him in a taxi to St. Vincent's Hospital. We sat in the waiting room for two hours. He cried the whole time. Then we were told that they would not accept him. He had been sitting there drinking and got absolutely impossible, screaming and yelling. I, too, shouted something about being from a civilized country with free hospital and health care for everybody. Then the police were called, and we were thrown out in great style.

We took a cab to the emergency room at Bellevue Hospital and sat there with the strangest people: screaming, hysterical, suicidal, and God knows what. We sat there until six o'clock in the morning, but nothing happened. Meanwhile the man drank his entire bottle and sat on the floor and cried with his head in Erica's lap, begging us not to leave him. Several times he urinated in his pants, and a pool formed around him as he took his penis out and let it hang there. Erica kept tucking it back in, but it kept coming out. Most of the patients had by then fled out of the room. Then he began to vomit all over the place, the most peculiar slimy and stinking puke I had seen in a long time. At that point even the two nurses fled. We tried to wipe it up. Around six o'clock we were totally exhausted, and since the nurses solemnly promised that he would be admitted to the hospital, we went home and slept.

Two days later I went to Bellevue to visit him and give him some cigarettes. I was told that no one had been admitted under that name. I was furious and sad and dared not tell Erica about it at all. New York is a city which simply does not permit any human being to be human. If you are to survive here, you must learn to leave other people to their fates. Erica, of course, is not from New York, so I will keep living with her for a while longer. But soon I will go back 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

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.

1974 - NYC

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.

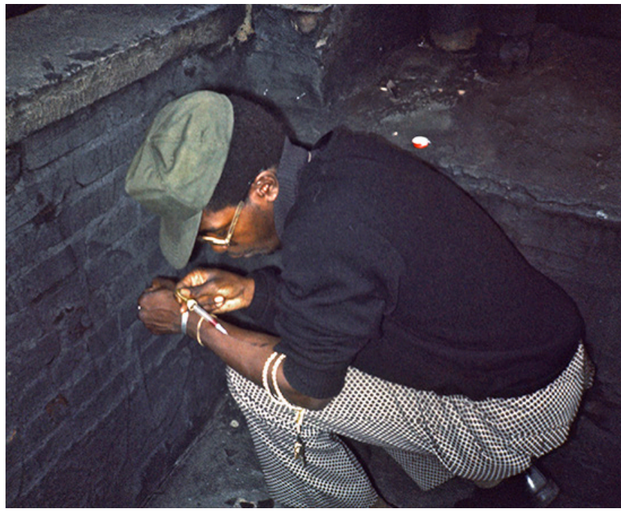
This woman embodies Harlem's impossible choices. An attacker forced his way into her apartment and tried to kill her with a knife. She escaped by leaping out a third-floor window—surviving, but crippled for life.

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

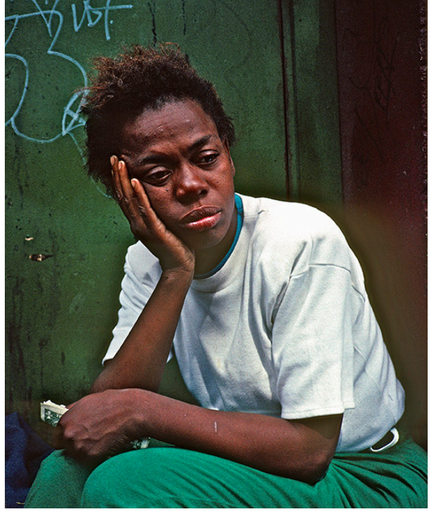
1985 - Harlem, NY

Losing Friends to Crack

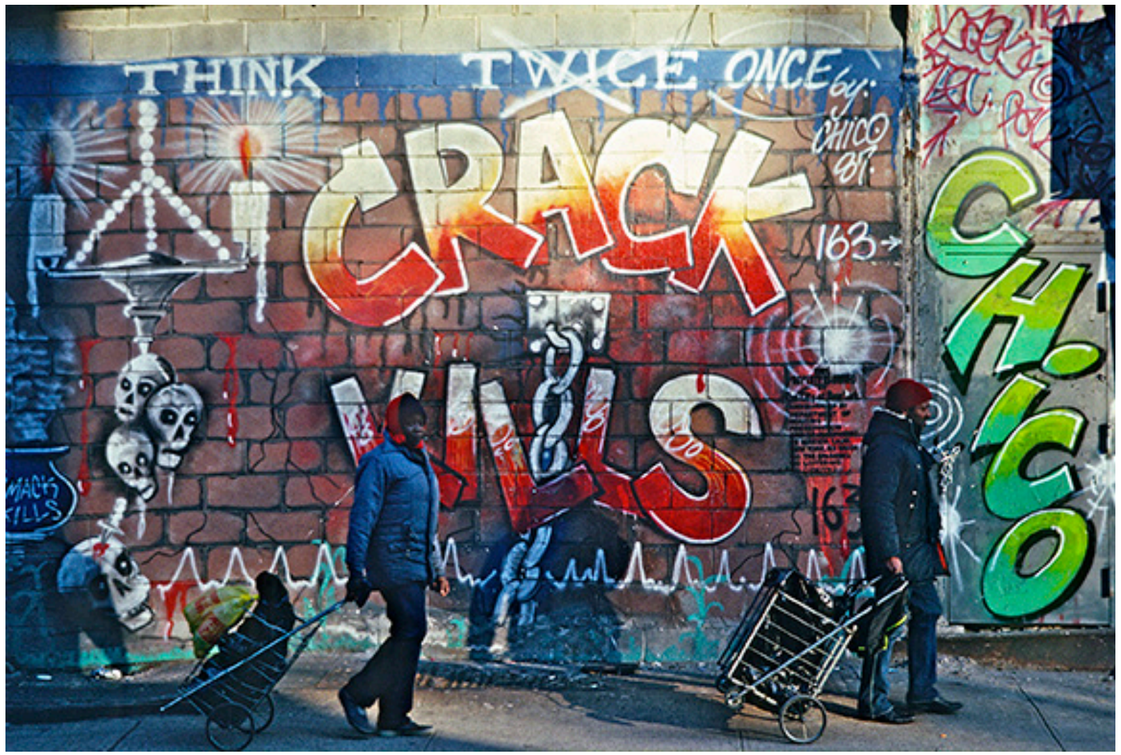
I thought I'd seen the worst in the '70s, when I'd learned to knock guns out of the hands of slow heroin addicts. But nothing prepared me for the devastation of the crack epidemic in the '90s, when victims fired wildly during their paranoid few minutes of high and constantly broke into my van or robbed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

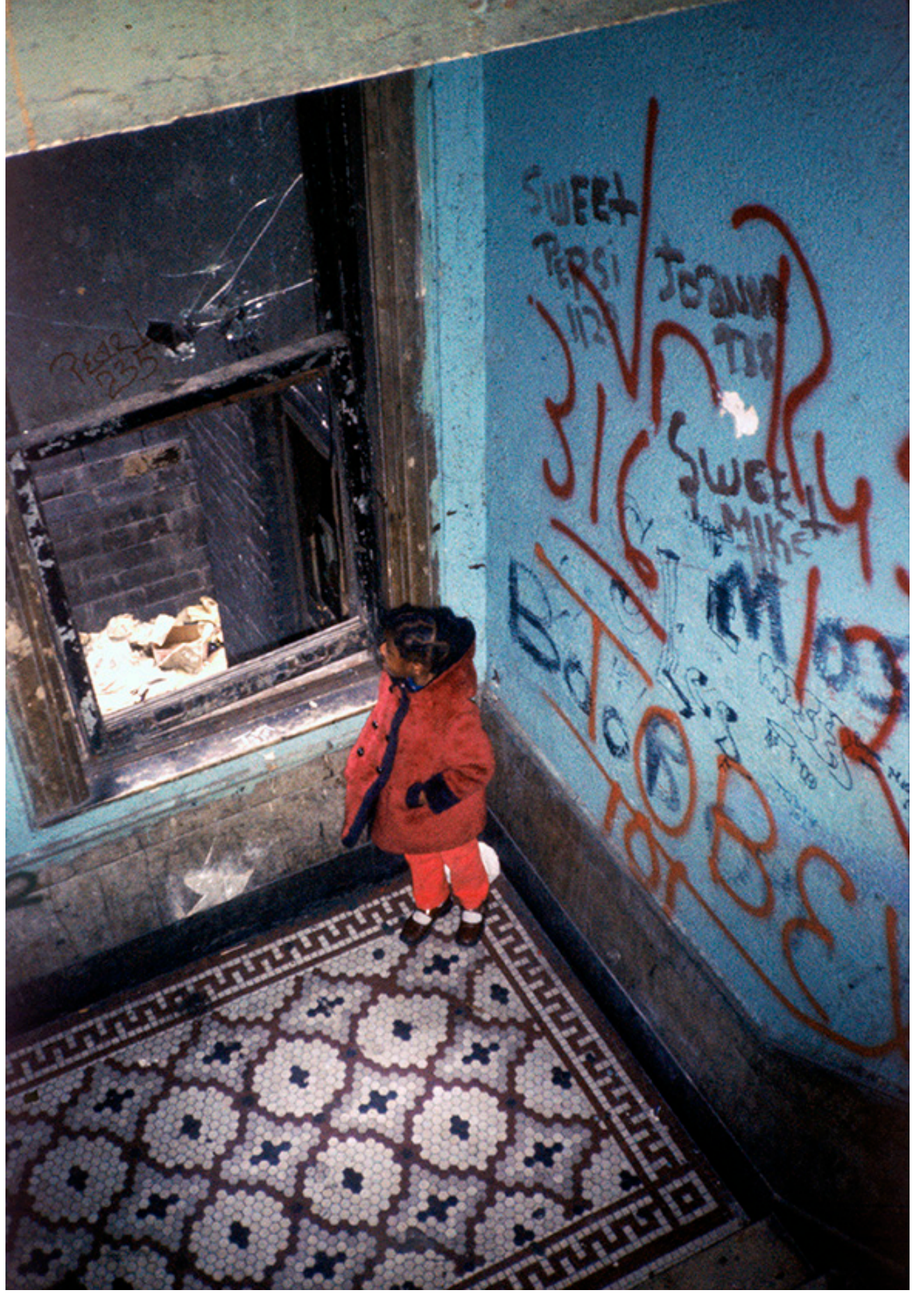
1989 - Harlem, NY

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

Note: Sort baggrund her

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

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?

Give a damn III and this section as it is presented in my slide-show

1972 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY

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 reading 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

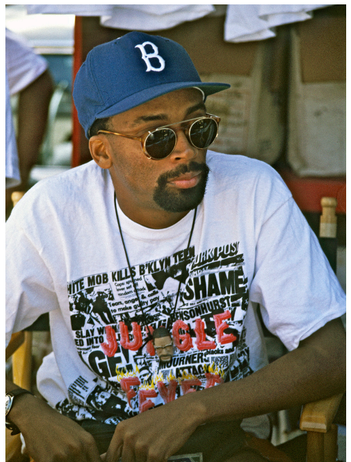
1995 - Harlem, NY

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

Note: Sort baggrund her

All three Merrilyn 1972 - NYC

1974 - Bronx, NY

1974 - Bronx, NY

We Love to Say It With Roses, but We Use Them in Our System of Oppression

"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

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.

"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

As bad as Harlem was, it wasn't the worst New York ghetto of the 1970s. In the South Bronx—where European film crews shot scenes resembling wartime Germany—whole districts saw nine out of ten residents die unnaturally: murder, hunger, overdose, rat bites. In Brownsville I saw two murders and heard of four more in a single day.

Most oppressors struggle to grasp how we build ghettos. There are no walls, and it isn't simply bad housing. Nor is it only the underclass we ghettoize.

I learned this in Detroit, where the housing was far better than in Harlem. I lived on both sides of the invisible line dividing the ghetto from the white neighborhoods—out where every white house was suddenly 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 blockbusting.

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.

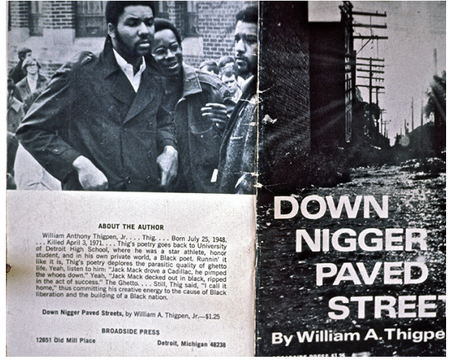
She is the second person I have known in America who has been murdered. Denia has now bought a gun and started target-practicing. That night in Chicago I also experienced my first big shootout, probably between police and criminals. We were on Mohawk Street when it suddenly broke out; I tried to look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

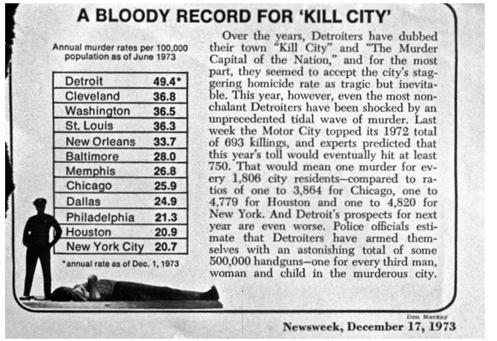
Unfortunately, he does not want to work politically; the system is too massive, he says. So now he works only to get back to Cuba. But he wants to go to Washington in two days to demonstrate against the Vietnam War. We will drive together. I can hardly wait to get out of this hell, and hope Washington 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 1,506 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.

Don Mackay

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

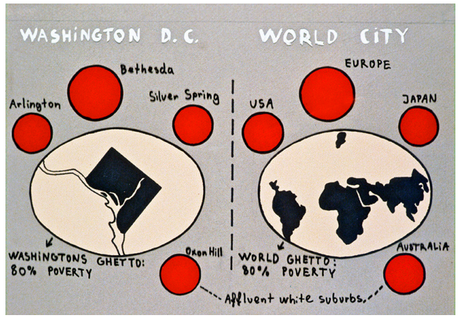
"In many ways, Washington, D.C., is a Third World country within a First World nation." - Alice Walker

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

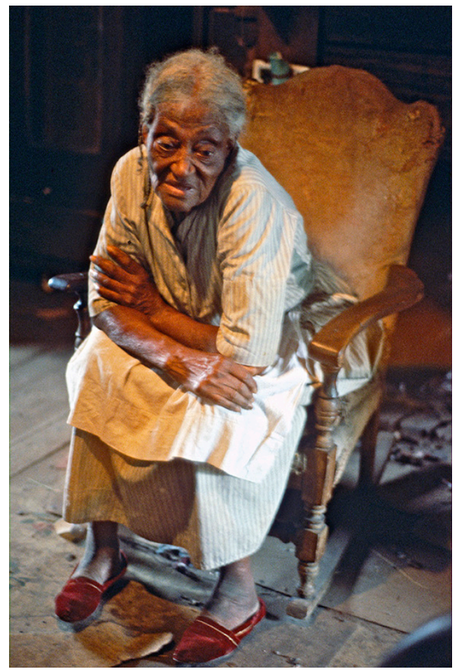
Each time we press a group into a ghetto—by our choices, our comforts, or our indifference—we wound them, and that wound soon circles back to wound us.

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



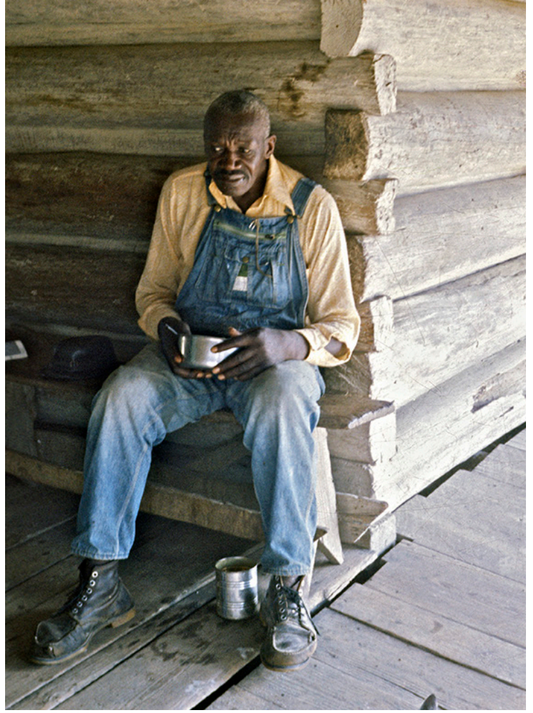
1978 - Waynesboro, GA

1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Norfolk, VA

1973 - Harlem, NY

1972 - NYC



1975 - Notasulga, AL

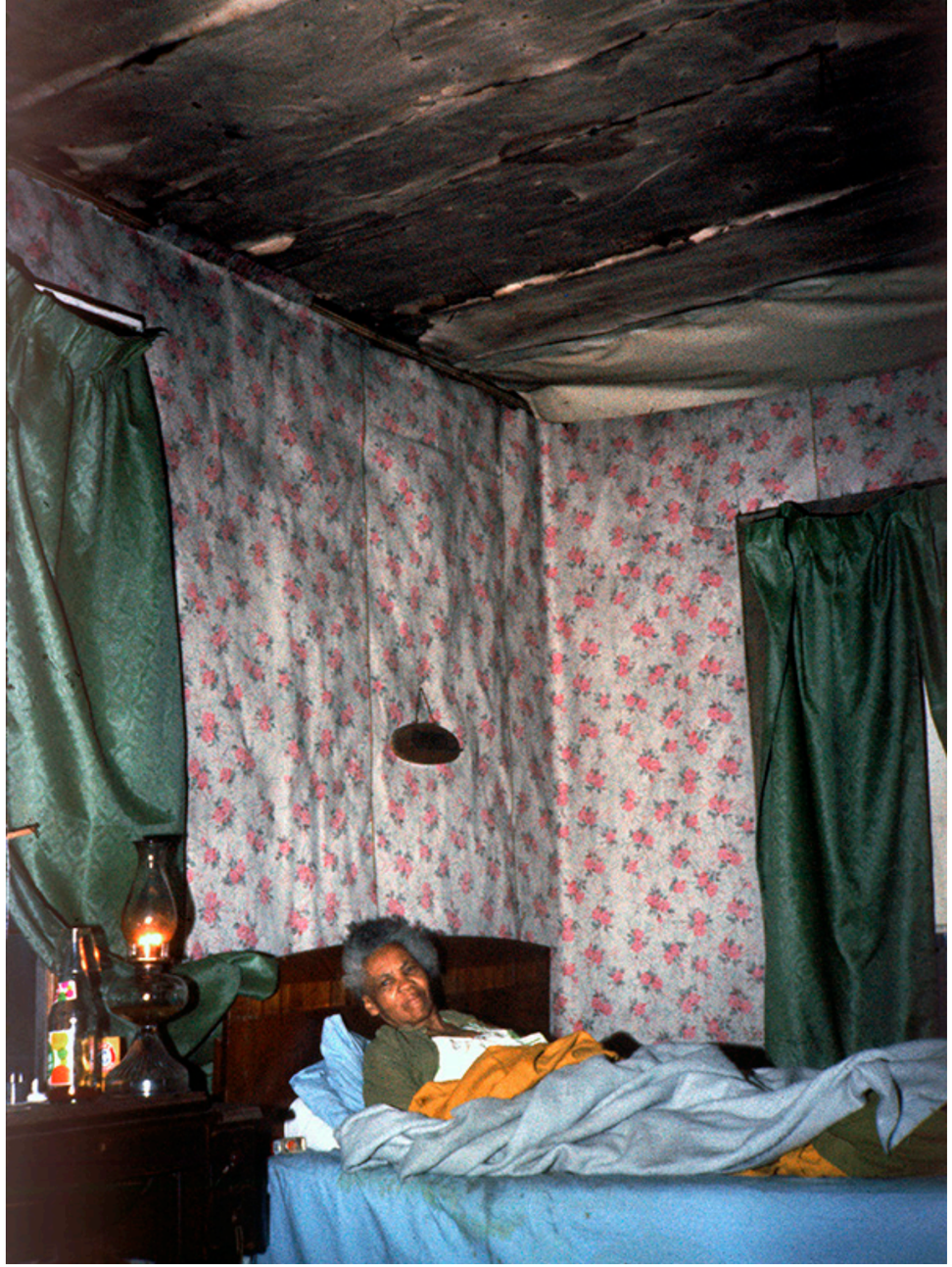
Bonds Forged in Oppression: The Black-Jewish Alliance

"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

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.

1992 - Burke County, GA

1990 - Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago

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.

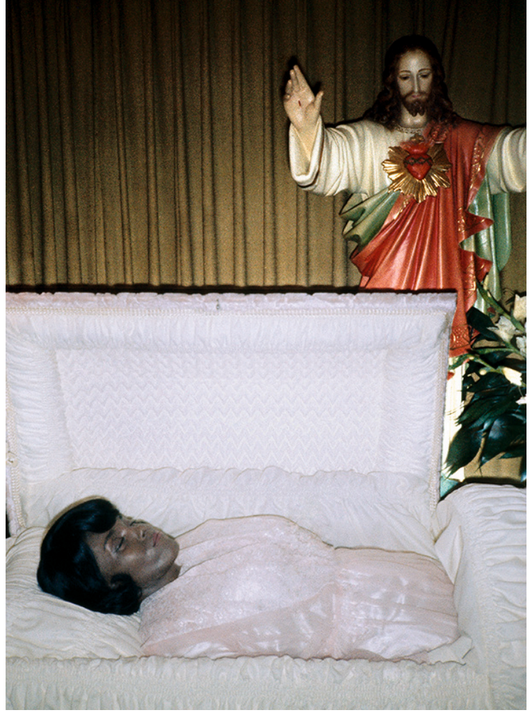
Trying to find Alphonso - on Danish TV in 1992

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 Interracial Relationships

"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.

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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.

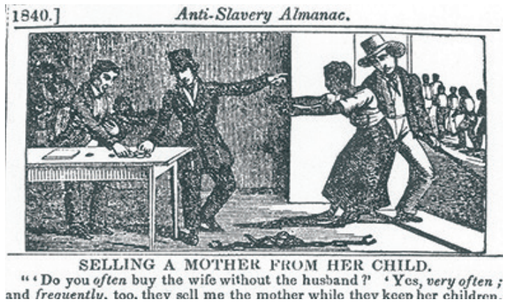
The same dynamic appears among Jews and European Muslims, who worry about losing identity through intermarriage. During World War II, European women were even punished for relationships with German soldiers.

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.

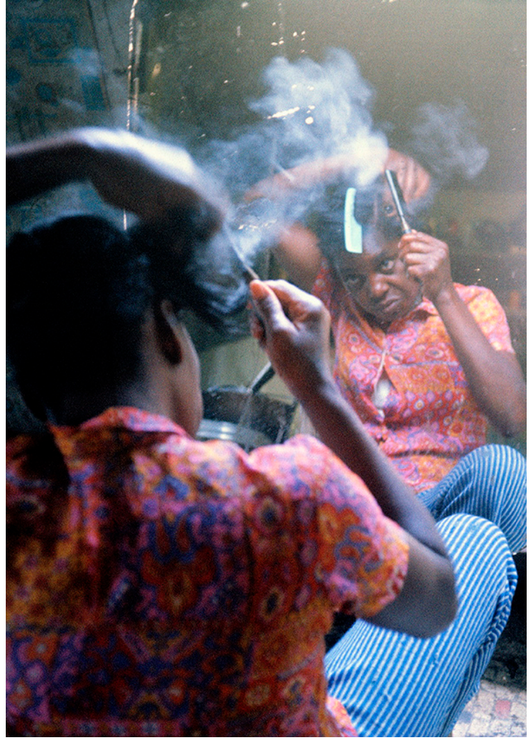
While white Southern womanhood was idealized, the "Aunt Jemima" stereotype portrayed the Black woman as the endlessly self-sacrificing "mama" who loves her white children as much as her own—strong enough to endure inhuman hardship—an image reinforced by watching her discipline her own children with a 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

'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.

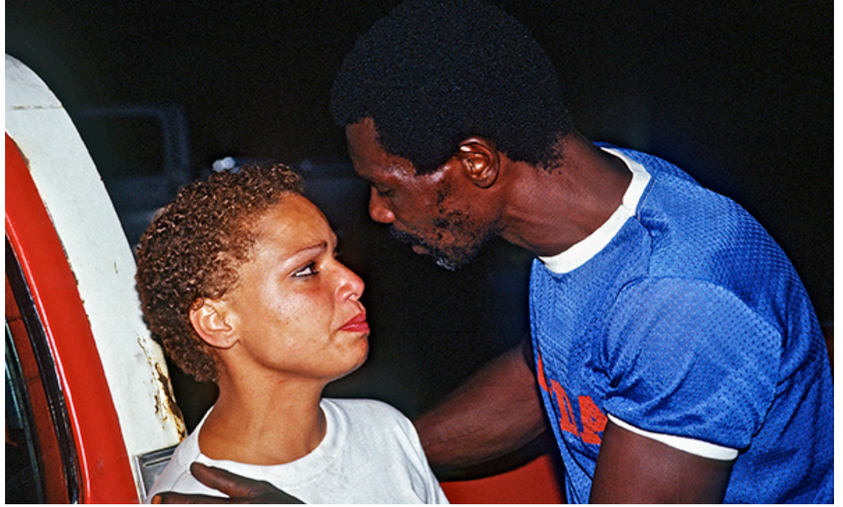
Even though the Black is Beautiful movement challenged these harmful ideals, I still hear non-white children teasing each other for having dark skin and curly hair. Yes, our massive cultural "gaslighting" leaves deep scars.

1975 - Seattle

1975 - San Francisco

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.

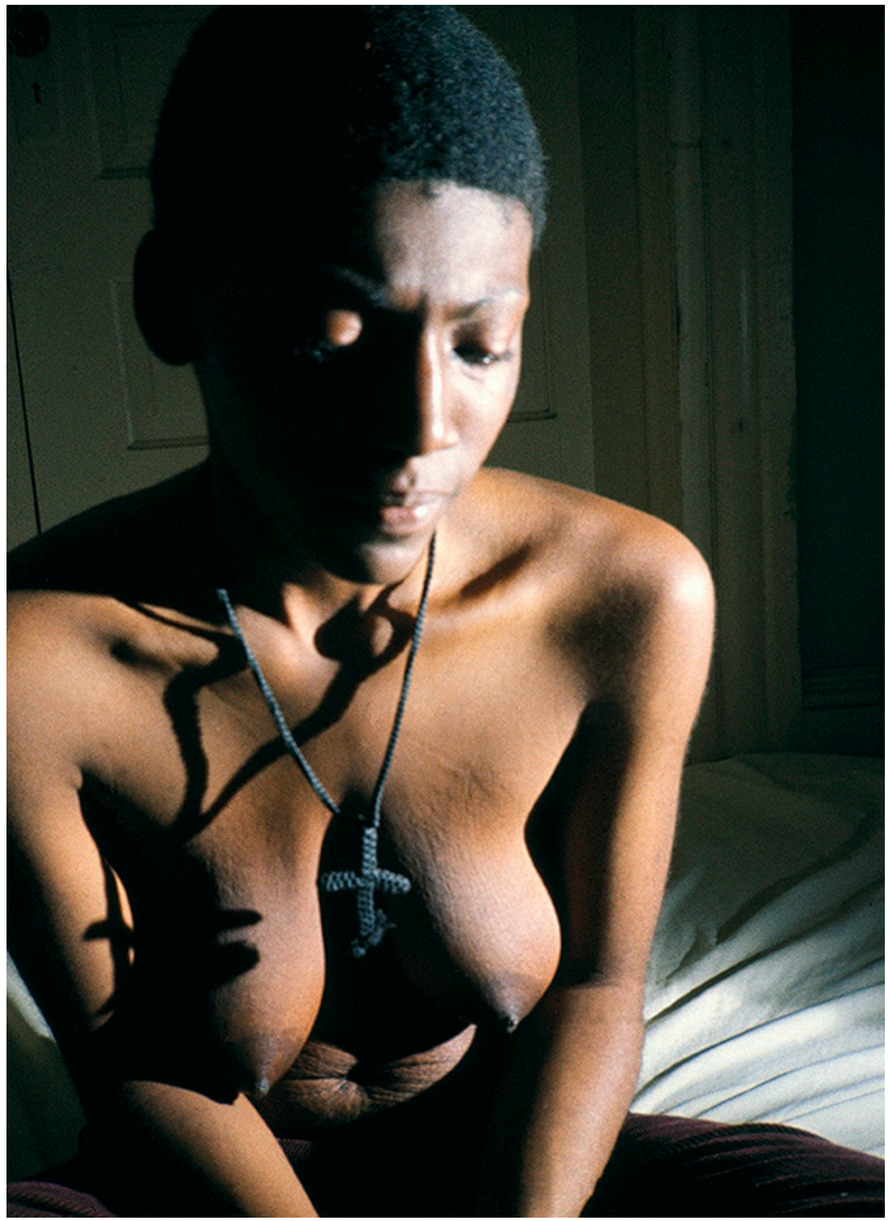
Bessie Christian seen on page 201 talking about the violence she suffered by her husband.

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."