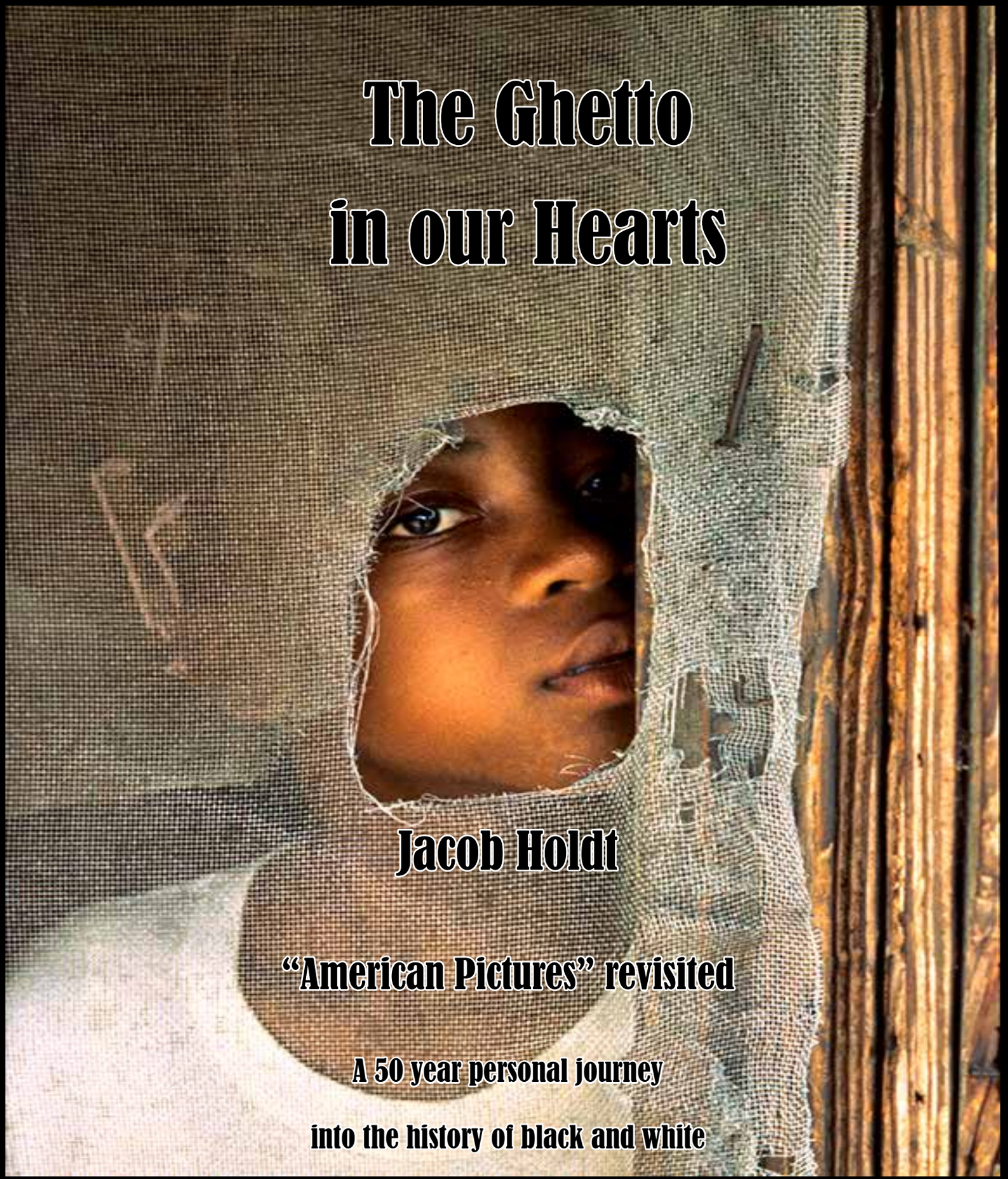


The Ghetto in our Hearts

Jacob Holdt

"American Pictures" revisited

A 50 year personal journey

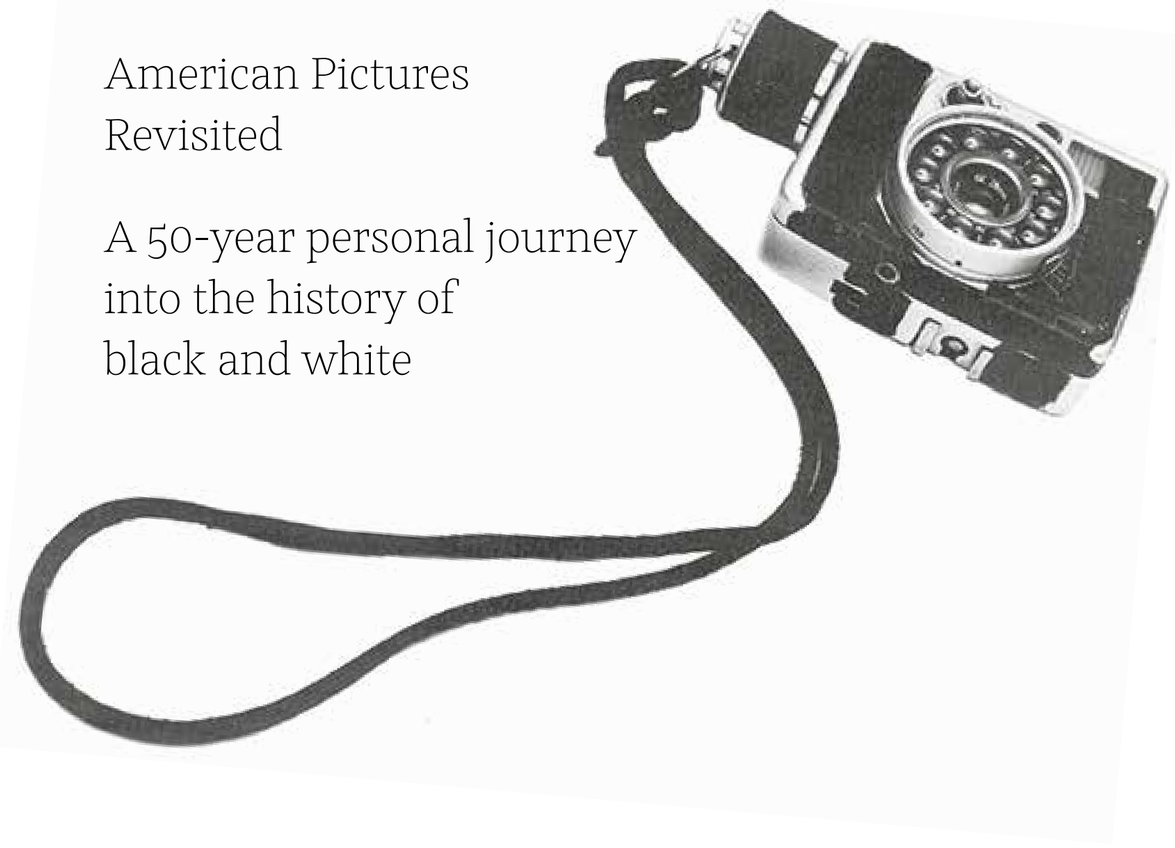
into the history of black and white

Jacob Holdt

THE GHETTO IN OUR HEARTS

American Pictures
Revisited

A 50-year personal journey
into the history of
black and white



The Ghetto in Our Hearts

The photo choice and layout by Jacob Holdt is partly based on the original design by Per Kofod and Kitte Fennestad for his travel book American Pictures from 1984.
In this new updated design Jacob Holdt is attempting to mix an educational/ political activist book with a larger art photo book given more space for the photos that were since exhibited in numerous museums. Carl-H.K.Zakrisson, Polytype has chosen the design and set it in Kaius Pro and Acumin Variable Concept fonts. English translation is made by Jacob Holdt with Vincent Czyz as American editor of the text.
The Danish text has been edited by publisher Søren Møller Christensen with the help of Lone Fatum.

At this moment it is unclear who will be the publisher apart from my friend Søren Møller Christensen., who has been supportive of the project from the beginning.

Until then © American Pictures Foundation and Jacob Holdt
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A book is rarely the work of one person, and a photo and travel book certainly becomes a very collaborative effort. I have decided in this book not to mention or changed all but a few of the real names. This saddens me since all but a few exploitative street photos are the result not only of people's hospitality, but usually of their strong cooperation, interaction and trust in me – as well as their later approval. Among the people who helped make the book I would especially like to thank those who gave me encouragement and financial donations during my first penniless vagabond years: Alice Turak ($10), John Ray ($20), Susan Kennedy ($30), Cary Ridders ($50), Allan Tunick (15 rolls of film). A very special thanks to Eveleen Henry and Marly Sockol for storing my slides and to Tommy Howard for lending me his old Buick with several tanks of gas to get around on the backroads in NC where I couldn't hitchhike.

Thanks since to Dick Boggle for donating his car, enabling me to bring the slideshow to most of the people in the book upon my first return to the US. For criticism and feedback over many years, through which many of the ideas in the book grew, I am deeply indebted to Tony Harris, who for 30 years was my partner in racism workshops in hundreds of American and European schools. And to the thousands of students in my workshops, who opened up their hearts and taught me about a much deeper racism and the pain behind it than I could originally see and photograph as a naive and superficial vagabond. And to the blacks who – although my slideshow was often too painful for themselves to see in their mostly white university settings – nevertheless insisted that the whites "see and understand our pain" and again and again brought me back to their campuses for that reason.

More to come....

With love Jacob Holdt
The Ubuntu House
Copenhagen, Denmark
www.american-pictures.com

Test on qr scaled

A LESSON ON OPPRESSION

50 years of black/white oppression in America as experienced and photographed by a white traveler with some insights and inspiration for liberation fighters worldwide

PART ONE - PAGE 20:

"Roots of oppression" - The basic and historical patterns of oppression

INTERMEDIUM - PAGE 222:

"Understanding the roots of white hatred" - Studying the oppression in childhood of people in hategroups and serial killers of blacks

PART TWO - PAGE 262:

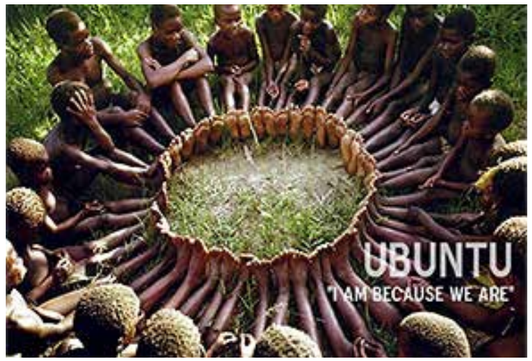
"The ghetto in our hearts" - Understanding how we who want to do good end up oppressing blacks in America and minorities in other countries

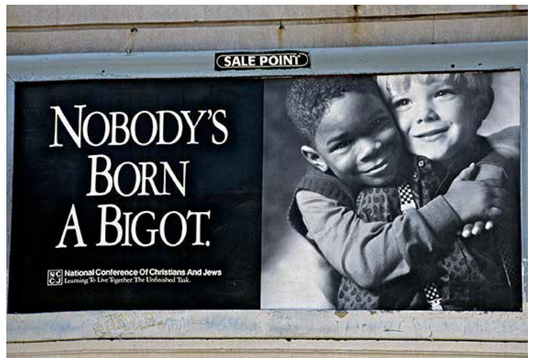
AFTERWORD - PAGE 498:

My thoughts on healing

A MULTIMEDIA BOOK:

Many pages contain QR links to videos of transcribed songs and interviews from the slideshow American Pictures which the book is based on. Also to updated stories about the people featured in the book. See an overview here, as well as online updates about friends who were not included in the printed book.





Point of departure

Before we start our journey trying to understand and act on the dark forces dividing us, let us not forget the enlightened human creeds uniting us.

The rebel: There is not anywhere in the world a poor creature who's been lynched or tortured in whom I am not murdered and humiliated...
...Aime Cesaire: "Les Armes Miraculeuses"

We are asked to love or to hate such and such a country and such and such a people. But some of us feel too strongly our common humanity to make such a choice.
...Albert Camus

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools. Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.
...Martin Luther King

Hate the sin, love the sinner.
... Mahatma Gandhi

Beyond the questions of right and wrong there is a field.
I will meet you there.
....Rumi

In Africa there is a concept known as 'ubuntu' – the profound sense that we are human only through the humanity of others; that if we are to accomplish anything in this world it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievement of others.
.....Nelson Mandela

Disclaimer

MPORTANT! The images in this book portray neither African Americans and black culture nor whites and white culture since a disproportionate number capture the black underclass and white upper class. They are allegorical visual statements used in a parable about oppression. Nor is this a book about the historical oppression of blacks. Rather, it is "history as seen in the present." More specifically, the visual expressions of racism I witnessed over a 50-year span of American history. The patterns I observed were fundamentally parallel to those I saw in my anti-racism work with Indigenous people in Latin American, Palestinians in Greater Israel, Batwa pygmies and other marginalized groups in Africa and Asia, Dalits in Nepal, Muslims/Ahmadiyya/Kurds/Roma in Kosovo, Turkey, Iraq, and Denmark.
All oppressions have victims. As a rule, however, people have lived in them for so long that, individually, they tend to see themselves as strong, resilient people rather than as victims—even though all the statistics show that as a group they are oppressed by invisible (non-photographable) forces.
In these woke times, some readers will react negatively to a white foreigner trying to describe the problems of black Americans, but as my black allies always pointed out, it is precisely my—our—responsibility as whites to put pressure on other whites to end the racism most of us don't see and may only understand when a visual representation of the human devastation it causes is slammed in our faces. Education is one way of achieving this.
This is the reason blacks saw me as a useful tool in universities. "White students listen to you," they said, "but not to our own spokesmen, even though we're saying the same thing as you."
My primary approach to portraying racism has been to live for years with its most defeated victims. The result is that I was in danger of having my vision so distorted that I (like the racists) didn't always recognize all those who were able to make it despite the oppression. My perspective has also been distorted by years of teaching (in university) so many of these black "dandelion children," that is, individuals who thrive no matter the conditions. The upshot is that I'm experiencing the reverse danger of no longer being able to see the deeper costs of racism for the group as a whole. Today, when I've stopped traveling by airplane due to climate destruction, I've lost connection with these opposing aspects of black society here in Denmark. My vision is once again distorted, this time by seeing incredibly talented black TV hosts and politicians in the media with nothing to contradict this glossy image, just as, conversely, Americans have their views distorted by the endless fear-mongering of local news broadcasts and their footage of blacks in handcuffs. The imbalance in my head is maintained today by working with exactly the same patterns that apply to Europe's vulnerable minorities as a result of the exploding racism we expose them to over here.
I therefore hope that my book, both here and over there, like the old American Pictures, will be used in teaching, and thereby once again show that it is not about blacks and black culture, but about people who feel oppressed, excluded and unloved by others—by all of us who carry the "ghetto in our hearts." Never before have I seen people so divided and alienated from each other in ghettos and casts, in echo chambers or filter bubbles in which, without the human touch (especially on social media), our innate empathy and ability to talk to each other is stifled, even within families, threatening to destroy democracy itself. Some believe that this may one day end in a civil war unleashed against some imagined "other" – like the Tulsa Massacre a hundred years ago – a disease picture triggered by what my Scandinavian predecessor Gunnar Myrdal analyzed as a deeply ingrained caste system in our hearts: "The American Negro problem is a problem in the American heart."
The ghetto in our hearts is therefore about anything but blacks, as my old comrade in arms James Baldwin pointed out again and again, which is why I use more supporting quotes from him than from any contemporary writer.
At the end of the book, let's discuss solutions to the problem of reaching each other in our ghettos and bubbles. I myself am making such an attempt here in my dialog center, The Ubuntu House, from where I started American Pictures back in the day.

With love
Jacob Holdt,
The Ubuntu House, Copenhagen, Denmark

UBUNTU
Ubuntu, a traditional African concept, is the affirmation of one's humanity through the recognition of an "other" in his or her uniqueness and differences. Can we integrate this old "African Dream"—"We are because you are, and since you are, I definitely am."—with the idea of "the American Dream"?

Link to the Ubuntu House in Copenhagen

Foreword by Arthur Jafa

I saw Jacob Holdt's slide show in a university in Washington, DC, in the 1980s, and it made an indelible impression on me. I have several copies of his book American Pictures—I buy extra copies for friends every time I see it in a bookstore. The main thing that struck me from the first time I saw the book was that I just had never seen images that I felt were as accurate in their renderings of the South that I knew. I grew up in Clarksdale, Mississippi, in the middle of the Delta, which is outside of the Appalachians, in the poorest region in America. But I just had never seen images of the South before I saw Jacob Holdt's pictures—outside of my family's photo albums; that would be like the only equivalent of it. I'm talking about the unvarnished rendering of black people's lives, how black people were living—the pain, the anger, all of that. And there are images of black love and intimacy in those same pictures. There's a famous picture that Jacob Holdt took of a black man at the top of the stairs with a black woman, and they're nude. Nobody's ever taken a picture of black love like that before.

I read, in a kind of origin myth of how American Pictures came to be, that Jacob Holdt wrote letters home about the America he saw, and the Danes couldn't believe it because they had certain visions of what America was supposed to be—only then did his parents send him a camera, and that's when he started taking pictures. Jacob Holdt was not taking pictures because he was trying to be an artist, not because he was trying to do a survey for some NGO or some other kind of agenda. He was just trying to take pictures of what was in front of him. It has a pure impulse at its core. And not only did he just take pictures of what was in front of him, he didn't turn away from anything that he saw. He didn't say, here I can have my camera, but over here I cannot.

The first thing I wanted to ask him when I met him in person was, how do you get these pictures? Not why are they so good, or how do you feel about them, but how did people allow you to take cameras into their bedrooms and to their bathrooms or into their KKK rallies? And he just answered that he had one philosophy: "I never said no." And that's it. I don't personally think I'm equipped to do that because it comes with putting yourself in so much danger. But that's the only way to get certain kinds of pictures.

American Pictures is doing something that is very, very powerful and kind of unique in a way. It's almost like its very existence makes you question everything you've seen. Like it makes it apparent that there are some unspoken rules and regulations. I'm fascinated by how it operates outside of these narrow boundaries of what art is supposed to be, what a book is supposed to be. It's a book. It's art. It's a slideshow. You're just coming in contact with various iterations of a thing. All these things are true as a white man's vision of Black people. And they are all part of the totality. But I don't think it needs any justification or verification or anything like that.

There's a real relationship between Jacob Holdt's work and Nan Goldin's work. Most people would admit that Nan Goldin's masterpiece is "The Ballad of Sexual Dependencies," which was a slide show. In the most recent documentary about Nan Goldin, she talks about how it changed every time she presented it, because it was an infinite set of slides; there was always something she repeated, but the order always changed. It was a loose artifact. So, she has a career as a photographer, but her static project is bigger than just being a photographer. It's like still images, but images that fundamentally have to be understood in relationship to each other.

Although there's nothing else like American Pictures in my mind, one of the closest analogs to Jacob Holdt would be Robert Frank because his greatest pictures were on the road. And Diane Arbus, with her ability to look at the demented, the oppressed, and the overt horror of American society, and how in American society we're all freaks—they are the product of this America. I always think of her work now in relationship to Roger Ballen, in his pictures of white South Africans primarily, where you could see there's a lot of inbreeding and things like that. William Eggleston is the obvious counter figure because it's in some ways the same terrain, but a totally different approach. I love William Eggleston's work quite a bit, and it is obviously very great work as political photography. But I always felt like there's a wall of aestheticism between what he takes pictures of and the work itself—that's not a critique, that's just a part of his work.

To me American Pictures is like a jazz set—it's all over the place. It's like going to see a Miles Davis concert when Miles achieved his truest iterations of what he was. It wouldn't be like, now we're going to play "Green Dolphin Street," and then such and such. When they introduced the songs, one song morphed into the next song. The boundaries between songs were erased, like it was permuting the whole time. That's what American Pictures is. It refuses to isolate specific things. That's what's incredible about it. That's what's aesthetically challenging about it.

When I was a young man in university, there was an African filmmaker who came to show this film. Afterwards we had a discussion with him, and he said, "Do you know what a griot is in Africa?" I said I knew what a griot was, a storyteller. He then told me the origin story of how griots came about ... two brothers were taking this epic journey, like in The Iliad or The Odyssey. They left their village, had all these adventures, and then went back home after having been on the road for years. And as they were getting closer and closer to their village, they were exhausted. One of the brothers said, "Look, I'm tired now. I'm going to take a nap on the side of the road, but you just keep on walking, and when I wake up, I'll catch up with you. His brother said, "Okay, cool. I'm going keep walking and you catch up with me in a little bit. The brother lay on the side of the road and prepared to die. He knew he didn't have enough energy, and he didn't want to slow his brother down. He prepared to die, closing his eyes. At a certain moment his brother thought, He didn't catch up with me, I better go back and check on him. He saw his brother lying on the side of the road with his eyes closed. He realized immediately what had happened and took his knife, rolled his pants up, and cut his own calf off his leg. He made a fire cooked his own calf, and woke his brother up and said, "look, I found food to eat, so you'll get your strength back, and we can make it home." His brother ate the food, got his strength back, and they continued their walk. When they got home people cheered, but the cheering almost immediately turned into screaming because people looked down at the brother's leg, and they saw his leg bleeding. The brother who had eaten his brother's flesh knew immediately what had happened: He had consumed the flesh of his brother. He turned to his brother and said, "From this point forward, I'm going to sing praise songs of your sons and your daughters, and my sons and daughters are going to sing the praise of your sons and daughters."

Arthur Jafa once contacted me with his dream to have a photo taken holding hands with the two photographers who had inspired him most as an artist, William Eggleston and Jacob Holdt.

The filmmaker who told me this story explained that where he came from the griots are very powerful because they retain the cultural information, and when they die, they don't bury them with everybody else. They put griots' bodies in hollow trees and let the maggots eat them. It's because, as powerful as griots are, they feed on the flesh of the people. He said that if your calling is to document these things, to make pictures, renderings of these things, people's love, people's heartache, if you are here to document people's struggles, emotional, psychological, political, physical, spiritual, you got to understand that you're a vampire. And you have to accept that. You're taking pictures of their lives. You are feeding on their flesh. So that's all I would say to Jacob--he is an incredible vampire. I feel I've learned from American Pictures that you shouldn't question your griot, your vampire, your zombie impulse. You should question it in the sense that you should interrogate it and understand it in its fullest complexity, but you shouldn't necessarily feel like it's a fundamentally problematic impulse.

The most important thing about Jacob

Alex Haley claimed that his bestselling Roots was based on the story of an African griot. Here he is seen at a private screening of American Pictures in my theater in Copenhagen in 1977

Holdt's pictures is how unflinching they are. I don't think I've ever seen photos that are more unflinching than his photos. They're not like photos where you just run into a burning house and take pictures and say, "Hey, nobody's ever got here because I'm in the burning house." Despite the sort of unflinching, startling nature of the photos, they are quite nuanced. And I think something that often gets missed is this rare combination of a thing being unflinching and being nuanced. But the unflinchingness is what I most like about them despite their capacity to go right into the heart of darkness. I don't think they ever step into that heart of darkness without beautifully rendering the context that they find.

I think it's also true of art in general. There can be things about photos that won't let you turn away, and at the same time you find oppressive, you find problematic, you find destabilizing. But you still can't turn away. To me that's not something to run away from. To me that is the very nature of my personal message around what American Pictures is. I think it is great.

American Pictures shook people when they saw it, long before it became an art book. The thing is, America is never going to reach anything remotely like its potential. Even its equilibrium. Forget potential. It's not going to ever really be a society with equilibrium until there is a fundamental truth and reconciliation. We've never had a truth in reconciliation in America. We've run from it. It's a fundamental aspect of American society to run from these fundamental truths. So, Jacob's pictures disenchant people. They break these spells that people are comfortable with because they're familiar. His book is a book that basically snaps this thing and wakes you up. He operates on the hypnotism and confronts you with this thing that will basically snap you out of it in an instant and wake you up.

One of the important things that American Pictures does on a fundamental level is that it makes it impossible to sustain the delusion, the delusionary structures. People tremble in the face of American Pictures. People are brought up to say, "Why does that have anything to do with me? That's something that happened two hundred years ago. I wasn't there. I didn't do it personally." But by and large Americans—and when I say Americans, I'm saying white Americans--now have a really difficult time understanding this kind of historical burden. They have a hard time coming to terms with all their privileges. Everything they have accomplished, all the things they take for granted, are founded on their having inflicted genocide on native Americans, and for a hundred plus years, utterly exploited African Americans. They don't understand how fundamentally their benefits in society are based on these two fundamental spheres. And yeah, it's kind of unfortunate that a person is born into a situation where they're born into the role of the bad guys like Darth Vader or something like that, even when they're not bad people on an individual level. It's structural. They tremble in the face of American Pictures. Although these delusions that we have as American citizens are much harder to sustain in the presence of American Pictures, I never saw it as a political tract. I have books which I would call political books. They are books where a person had a very specific political agenda. I don't think American Pictures is narrowly ideological. It's not a Marxist manifesto. It's operating outside of narrow ideas of ideology. It'd be one thing if in the book it was just Jacob Holdt moving amongst Black people in a certain kind of way, but when he is moving among Klansmen, among gay people, all kinds of groups, you realize it's free of any kind of narrow ideology. It is somehow pure.

At the same time, I love this thing that Cornel West said: "There are things you cannot not know as a Black person in America." But I also think there are certain things that you absolutely must not know as a white person in America, because if you know these things, you can't enjoy your privilege. You can't utilize your privilege and your access unaffectedly. American Pictures points directly at both those two things, the things Black Americans can't ignore because it is their reality and the things white Americans must ignore in order to keep the status quo.

We're not having a conversation about whether American Pictures is the best version of what it does because there's nothing else like it. It's amazing that Jacob Holdt could do it then, when there were very few things that you could compare it to. But here we are, fifty years later, and it's still the case that you can barely compare it to anything. That means that it is a thing that is fundamentally going against some very complex and dense structures of what's allowed and what's not. Even if you're not very interested in the subject matter, you might be interested in the fact that there's nothing else like it. It's a very, very unique place that it has.

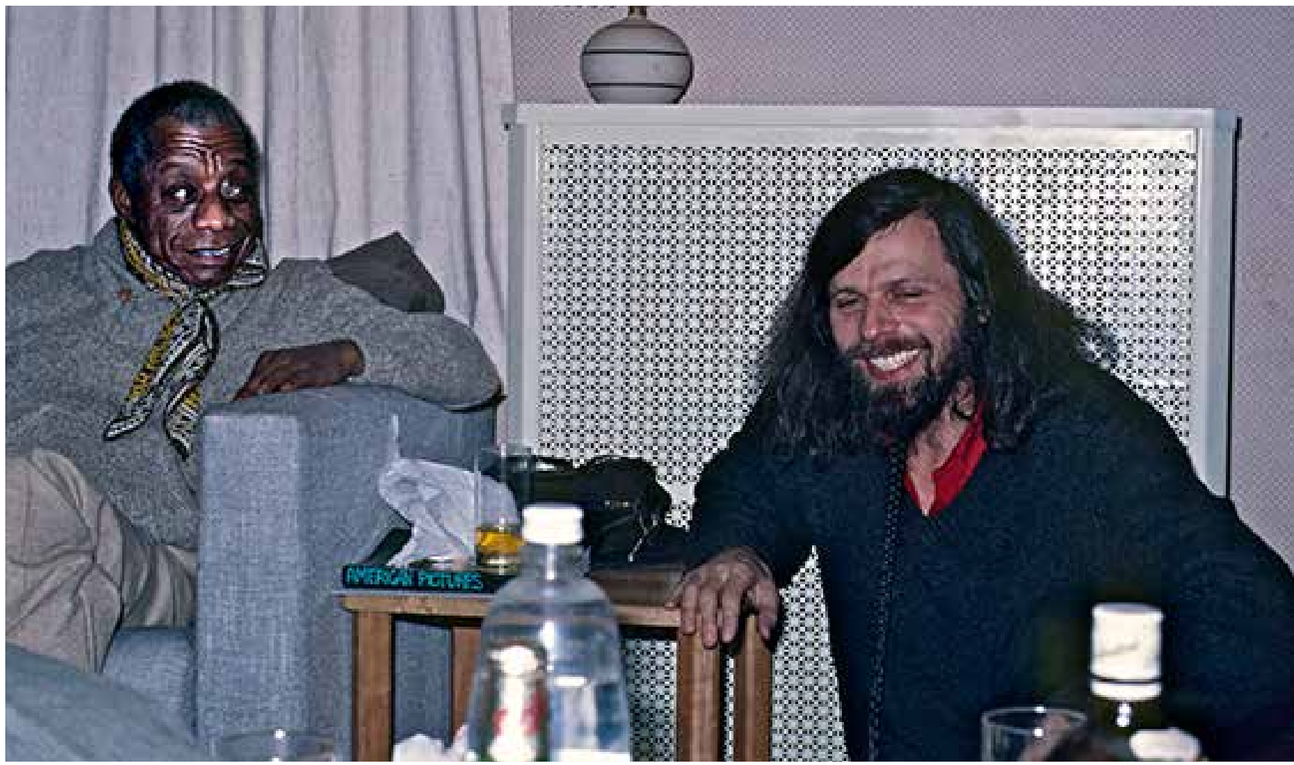
Arthur Jafa, 2023

Most important influence: James Baldwin

"The horror is that America changes all the time without ever changing at all."- James Baldwin

"I am impressed by how sharply you, as a white outsider, have been able to see and portray the oppression in the so-called 'post-racist' era of the 1970s, when all whites felt that blacks had taken their rightful place in society. I myself would not have learned to see white people objectively as human beings if I had not lived for so many years among a completely different type of white people in France. It is one of the best interpretations of black-white psychology – especially among Southerners – that I have ever seen."

- James Baldwin, speaking to me and Michael Thelwell, his fellow activist in the civil rights movement in the South and chair of African-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where they both taught. Thelwell had long tried to bring us together both there and during my lectures in France.



1987 - Talking with James Baldwin all night after he saw the 5-hour show

Foreword to My “Lesson on Oppression” –

an Experiment in Reverse Oppression—of the Reader

“The beauty of anti-racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward.” I jeoma Oluo in So You Want to Talk About Race

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. —Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

Dickens’s famous words describe exceptionally well my feelings when in 1970 I tried to bridge two societies—my own Danish with my new American—as well as my unwelcome new identity as a so-called “white,” with a separate parallel in “black” society. Hope and light seemed to envelope everyone a few years after the triumph of the Civil Rights Movement, which brought with it the promise of a better and racially integrated future soon to arrive. Just as, conversely, darkness and despair seemed to envelope everyone trying to stop the murder of millions of Vietnamese. The magnitude of the slaughter made me and millions of young people all over the world quite anti-American, and I had no interest in staying in the US when I hitchhiked from Canada on my way to Latin America.

Already, during one of my first days in the country, I was held up at gunpoint by angry blacks, yet I was also invited to live as the only white in Angela Davis’ Che Lumumba Club and taken into groups like the Black Panthers as well as being embraced by white antiwar groups. I soon became disoriented in this blinding twilight between darkness and light, and as I traveled through a North America struggling to find a new identity, lost my bearings.

I fell completely in love with the youth in their search for truth—and thus with America. I had no idea at the time that this love would endure for the rest of my life.
I wrote endlessly in diaries and sent innumerable letters to my parents about the people who invited me into their lives, and to my good fortune they sent me a cheap half-frame camera “so you can send some pictures home about your experiences.” I had never done photography before, but I found it a much faster way to remember people and events (than with words) and after almost six years returned home with 15,000 pictures.

For a long time, I used the camera as my photographic diary, but after I overcame my initial fear of ghetto neighborhoods, which got me mugged again and again, it felt as if I’d been taken by the hand and dragged into a world I hadn’t known existed. In my Danish school years, we had heard about Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, but it hadn’t changed our view of American society as basically white.

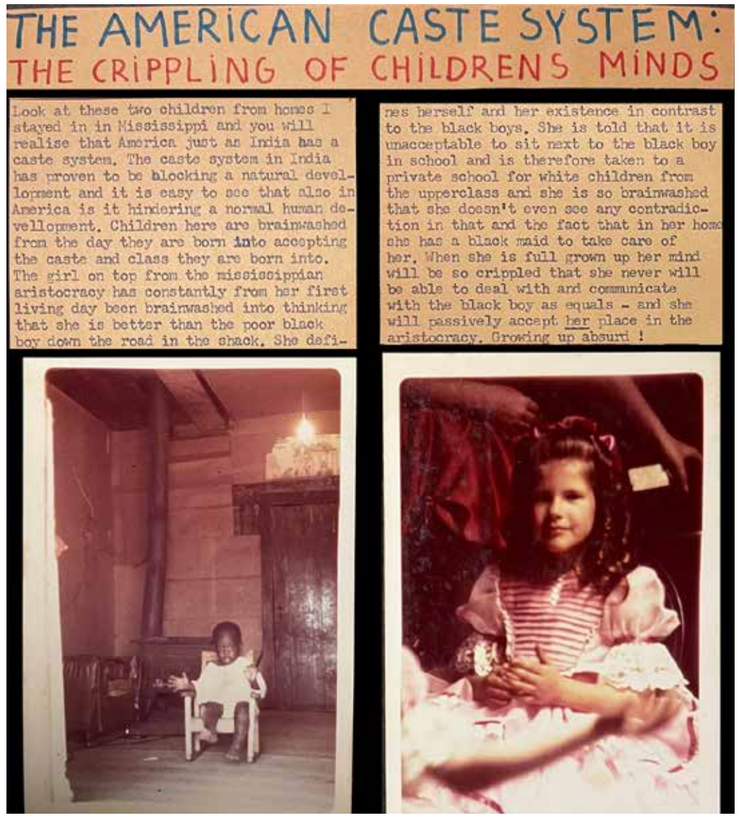
Apparently, most Americans also preferred to see it that way, and since most of the drivers who picked me up were white, I quickly found myself in the role of messenger between two totally separate and unequal worlds. Thanks to my naïvete, I didn’t see this as a result of racism; I was simply was incredulous that whites could allow blacks to live in such horrible conditions—often right next door. Worse, they didn’t even “see” it, or they justified it because they didn’t see blacks as fellow human beings. The same whites would do anything for me as a foreigner, and since I in return saw them as decent loving people, I didn’t consider them real racists and hardly ever used the word racism—a word I associated with the Civil Rights Movement ten years earlier and applied to the Ku Klux Klan—but sometimes “The American Caste System” and compared with India’s castes. No, I felt that all these loving whites were just badly informed and could easily be changed, such as when I took them with me to visit my black friends on the other side of the tracks. This is how my educational project started. I took more and more photos and put them in little books, with fitting Bible and Shakespeare quotes, to show to my drivers and hosts on the highway.

I also did it for selfish reasons since they were often so moved they gave me a couple of dollars or a lunch bag “to support your project, for these pictures need to be seen by all Americans.” The more I moved them, the more time I would save by not having to hitchhike twice weekly to the big cities and lie in blood banks for four hours at a time to sell my plasma for $5 or $6 (enough for two rolls of film). This had been my only source of income since arriving in America with only $40, a sum that lasted for six years due to the incredible hospitality of Americans. Over 400 homes housed and fed me while I hitchhiked nearly 111,000 miles through 48 states.

After about three years, I started feeling that I was working on a project to educate white Americans one by one. The turning point came on March 8, 1974, when a woman took me to see a slideshow about coal miners at Santa Fe College in Florida. There were pictures, narration, and music, and although it was very primitive, it was extremely powerful, working by quickly changing images so that it almost seemed cinematic. And it used two screens, which I immediately could see would be an effective way to convey my own shock of experiencing the gap between white and black America. Often, teachers had picked me up and invited me to speak to their classes in colleges. How much more effective would my message be if I could convert my small picture books into slideshows presented for whole classes at a time? I must confess that at that time I hadn’t in my wildest fantasy imagined that I would, only a few years later, end up presenting them for as many as 2000 students at a time in American universities. Nonetheless, from now on I was aware that I was working on a slideshow. This was only a year before I had to flee America, a year during which I was stuck in a marriage in San Francisco. I spent a lot of that time unproductively, writing numerous applications to get funds to buy better camera equipment—“If only I could get a real Nikon!”—but in vain. Not even when blacks were on the foundation boards.

One difficulty I had in those years, when everybody felt that “the race problem had been solved” and things were moving forward, was that many successful blacks felt uncomfortable with my images—out of shame that their own brothers and sisters still lived in these conditions and even more from the fear that the images would negatively stereotype blacks in the white mind. My own feeling was that those stereotypes were already so deeply ingrained that whites needed to be informed about their own responsibility for disproportionally forcing blacks into poverty and crime. Even though I didn’t use the word “racism”, but rather “the American Caste system” or “the system of our daily oppressive thinking” (my term for “systemic racism,” before the phrase was coined, which made us responsible, not “the system”), I felt that my pictures clearly showed the human devastation racism had created all around us.
The many moral questions about what happens to your own white mind when for several years you move around primarily in the

1973 – Denmark, SC



1972 – Typical page about the caste system in my picture books

devastation of the black underclass, without much interaction with better-off blacks, will also be discussed in this book. One result was that in the last year I felt I couldn't finish my project without going to countries like Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil, with their different forms of slavery, if I genuinely and objectively wanted to see, understand, and describe the difference between "true blackness" and "the result of oppression." For in that sense, all of us living in a Caste society with systemic racism are prisoners in Plato's cave. That, however, would have been an endless academic project well out of reach for a high school dropout like me. So I don't claim with this book to be more than a "street-wise" caveman in my attempt to give voice to those equally lost "street-wise" people in the ghetto who would always say, "Hey, man, this is nothing but slavery." Can there, I ask in a book experienced from a frog's-eye view, be any truth in such statements in a so-called "free society"?

In the end I had to return to Denmark but not until after almost being assassinated and living in constant fear that the FBI was about to confiscate my photos.

I was very disillusioned when I moved back into my childhood home, a village rectory. My father, a pastor, lent me money for three slide projectors and in less than two months I made a slideshow to present in his local church. In that rural area, I had no access to a library to do research, and Google hadn't yet been invented.

It was as though five years of pent-up social anger just poured out of me. I thought I could always do the research when I went back to America with "the show" (a slideshow accompanied by taped music), but rumors about it spread so fast that it was soon being presented all over Europe by black American volunteers, often with thousands lining up to see it (although I still had no time to fact check it, the blacks vouched for it all).

In less than a year, it was made into a best-selling book, and we set up a foundation to give all profits from the show and book to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. However, only a month after publication, I found out that the Soviet Union intended to use it worldwide against President Carter's human rights policies, pointing at its pictures to (wrongly) claim that human rights were just as bad in America as in communist Russia.

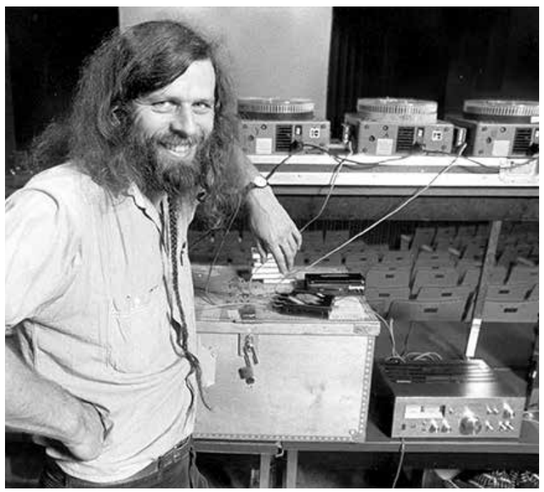
Since I was a great fan of Carter—the first American president not to overthrow democratically elected governments all over the Third World—I decided to sue to stop sales of my book in the rest of the world. After which I moved back to America with my slideshow, where I felt it belonged.

Here it also became an instant success, and for the next 30 years, I was on stage in a new college almost every night on my tours—often standing room only. Also, here I experienced darkness and light at the same time. I was locked up in dark auditoriums five hours a night, changing slide trays every

See the entire slide show—now online - liberated from the nine heavy boxes of AV equipment I lugged around for 40 years

1973 – Washington, DC

1975 - San Quintin, CA



11987 - Before the show in Boston College

Often students only needed such advertising when I returned to campus

1991 - Even my 10th show here in Stanford U. was packed in the biggest auditorium

Raleigh, NC - Again fighting with Angela Davis about the ideas in the show
Listen to our fight on my recording below

1991 NYC - Between campus lectures I spent the nights with the homeless

five minutes. After 7000 shows, I ended up having spent 35,000 hours of my life in darkness. What a waste of life if it had not been for the light—or mutual enlightenment—I experienced the next day in my racism workshops. These were attended by "shell-shocked" students now committed to eradicating their own racism and by blacks who understood how internalizing racism had clipped their wings. Here I learned more about the toll racism took on whites than I ever did during my five years of vagabonding through its destruction of black lives.

Yet Tony Harris, my black assistant, and I almost never talked about racism—despite his psychological insights and his ability to draw on his own ghetto experiences.

For it took hours and often whole days to help the students become aware of and heal the injuries they'd individually suffered in their upbringing—even the most successful and on the surface "privileged" Ivy League students.

Usually there was a lot of emotional discharging or crying in the room as they all gradually realized how their pain was shared and how they were in this boat together—black and white. Afterwards, they often started weekly "American Pictures unlearning racism" dialogue/healing groups on campus after Tony and I left, and within a year brought the show back to campus to help shock more students into similar unlearning groups. We received many letters from them about how it had gradually "cleared their minds" and "raised their intelligence." As a result, they were more "present" in class and got higher grades in school. It was living testimony to how racism and the other oppressions hurt our thinking, intelligence, and well-being.

Fighting racism, we insisted, was in our own self-interest. Yet we weren't so naïve as to think we could end racism. We only tried to create committed anti-racist racists, anti-sexist sexists, etc. aware of how they'd always be victims of society's systemic racism but committed to working on its effect on themselves in solidarity with those whom racism was crushing—especially when they got into positions of power, enabling them to help change systemic racism.

I often got invitations to join them 15–20 years later, now that they had positions in government and big business and their groups met again to evaluate how the show had changed their lives. I am trying to convey much of what they taught me in this difficult book.

Yes, "difficult" for most. For anybody who knows a little about campus life in America knows how short the attention span of students is. When speakers come to campus, students often start walking out after half an hour if they don't think they can use the lecture to get higher grades. If they had known how long my lectures were, they would never have shown up for them. Let alone if they'd known they were about racism!

So we always had to trick them into coming, and once they were there—as they told us—they struggled with their guilt about papers they absolutely had to write the same night. Yet they usually stayed for the full five hours. And even skipped all the classes the next morning to go to our racism workshops instead.

How did I achieve that and have packed houses—even in Harvard, where, on my first visit, they told me that that same week they had three world-famous statesmen speaking (who'd drawn only 20 or so students)? Harvard Black Law Students (to which both Barrack and Michelle Obama belonged) re-invited me 18 times over the years—to packed halls. It was the same story in the other Ivy League schools.

As I understood it, from reading their many papers and letters about the experience, it was because I (unintentionally) had oppressed them. They went through systematic oppression—or rather "reverse oppression." Let me explain.

Almost everywhere, I saw the students in the same way they saw themselves: as basically good, well-intentioned, caring people who really wanted to do good for blacks, the poor, and society. They didn't see themselves as racist and often rationalized it away: "I'm a good Christian, so I can't be racist," etc.

They felt they were doing right, but over the hours of the show, I gradually broke down their defenses and showed them step by step how they were doing wrong, how everything they did was oppressing blacks. During intermission (after the first two hours), many would still have their defenses intact and in their hearts blame others (e.g., people in the South) for being the real racists. Or a few, such as a hospital administrator in Philadelphia would attack me, the messenger. But after five hours, all their escape routes had been blocked, all their defenses broken down, and I saw them night after night walk out crying, heads bowed in guilt. Some, like the hospital administrator, asked, "How can I put money into your project so it can be spread all over America?"

When teachers asked the white students to put words to their emotions, I was astonished to find that they chose almost verbatim the same ones that blacks listed when asked to put words to what they suffer from daily because of our racist thinking. The one that constantly tells them that everything they do is wrong and blames them for everything, leaving them with almost no escape, no light at the end of the tunnel. When you yourself feel you are doing right, but from birth are endlessly bombarded with messages that you're wrong, you certainly don't end up with very constructive feelings. This is what effective oppression is all about, and the white students suddenly experienced it in themselves, which was so shocking that the next day they skipped classes to try to heal their racism—a change I believe couldn't have been achieved in a two-hour academic lecture (without pictures and music) even by the best of my main competitors on the lecture circuit, such as Angela Davis or Coretta and Yolanda King.

For this reason, some universities, such as conservative Dartmouth, even forced all their freshman students to go through my "reverse oppression" program before starting classes. I should point out that I had a long-standing conflict with Angela Davis after an interview with her about black self-hate in my first show. Even after a personal presentation in her own home, she never agreed with me and refused to finance the show every time her students in UCSC brought me back. Luckily, I had the support and endorsement from most other leading

Tony Harris in our workshop (left) and in interview from 1991 about our work together

Except from my fight with Angela Davis - before we did a private slideshow in her home in Oakland 7 years after

1985 - I in white shirt at slideshow table present it outdoors to support the Divestment boycott of Columbia Univ.

black spokespeople, such as James Baldwin. People in France and Amherst were always trying to bring us together. Finally, he drove two hours in a terrible snowstorm to see the show, after which we talked the whole night. He felt it was the closest thing he'd ever experienced to describing his own view of white racism, but he was already sick and, sadly, died of stomach cancer only a couple of months later.

Most years, Martin Luther King's daughter, Yolanda King, was my main competition as a speaker for Black History Month, but then we teamed up to do a performance for President Clinton at the Kennedy Performing Arts Center as a tribute to Martin Luther King.

I also presented it at the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta. Afterward, the family wanted to show it there permanently, "for it shows better than anything what Martin fought against, which today's black youth doesn't know much about."

And so I continued for 30 years until we got the first black president elected, after which I retired in the belief that things were moving in the right direction. Well, again I was a bit naïve, and the rest is history ....

Racism/casteism/xenophobia exploded in Europe and in my own country, Denmark, where I now felt it was my duty to be the same kind of messenger in a divided society. I watched in horror at how Trump was inspired by the way racist European politicians won elections by using divisive, hate-filled rhetoric. After many years of American politicians speaking politically correctly and only using coded racism, this now happened in America too. When as a result we started seeing overt hate and racism exploding in America—the Klan groups I'd worked with now came out in the open, and the racism of the police allowed them to openly justify the killing of blacks—I felt it was difficult for me to sit as a passive witness.

The Black Lives Matter movement, which arose in response to the fact that murders of black men are now often filmed on cell phones and shown on social media, surprised me by becoming the largest anti-racism movement I had seen in the US. But since there didn't seem to be much awareness, especially among the many white participants, of the deeper systemic racism that lay behind the violent black anger, I got the idea of trying to create a textbook that, like my old slideshow, bombards the reader with images that show the roots of all the oppression I had personally witnessed. Often my American audiences told me that when they gave my old book to their otherwise open-minded parents, they immediately closed it with great discomfort. So, I know that my new book will evoke the same strong defense mechanisms in its attempt to "oppress" (in the positive sense of a short-term, reverse suppression) their self-understanding. Or let me say "our" self-understanding, because in my experience no one goes free under systemic oppression.

So this book is a pictorial lesson about oppression and the damage it does to us. The most important form of oppression is the kind children are subjected to by adults. All over the world, children are harmed at a very early age by their unreasonable and irrational behavior. This causes severe patterns of distress and results in harmful behavior. Later in life we re-enact these distress patterns on our own children or on each other in, for examples, sexist, racist, nationalistic, totalitarian, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, homophobic, elderly, disability, caste or class oppression.

In most of us these patterns have become so chronic that we become defensive when challenged and end up blaming the victims. We dare not face the fact that in such systems we are both victims and oppressors. There are few places in the world where the main ingredients of oppression are as blatant as in the relationship between blacks and whites in the USA. From their tragedy I therefore believe we can learn something about ourselves and the damage we are exposed to and inflict also in other forms of identity discrimination.

Black or white, immigrant or native, we are born naturally open and inquisitive and without prejudice. But then things go wrong. We hear things like: "Niggers/wetbacks/Perks/Kikes are criminal/dangerous/unclean/inferior. They don't belong here."

For the loving and affectionate child, this is irrational, confusing and hurtful. While we are hurting our mind no longer thinks rationally and a rigid scar is created on our thinking. After years of such hurtful messages, we end up accepting and internalizing these limited definitions of ourselves and our society.

As seen through the "neutral" eyes of a foreigner I hope it will be easier to see how such racial attitudes cripple our character, whatever our color. Though there is plenty of racism in Europe, I was fortunate to have my childhood in Denmark during years when I was not severely hurt by social insecurity and racist conditioning. I was also fortunate that the first people I stayed with in America were not white. Most European visitors stay first with white Americans, who warn them, "Don't walk three blocks this way or two blocks that way," and immediately frighten them into accepting white fear and rigid segregation. My experience was just the opposite. The first American home to take me in was a black home on the south side of Chicago. With all their love, warmth, and openness, I immediately felt at home and saw whites only as cold distant faces on TV or in hostile suburbia. Later, traveling into the white world, I was no longer as vulnerable to its racist patterns of guilt and fear.

Traveling in such a deeply divided society inevitably was a violent experience: 4 times I was attacked by robbers with pistols, 2 times I managed to avoid cuts from men with knives, 2 times frightened police drew guns on me, 1 time I was surrounded by 10-15 blacks in a dark alley and almost killed. 1 time I was ambushed by the Ku Klux Klan, several times I had bullets flying around me in shootouts, 2 times I was arrested by the FBI, and 4 times by the Secret Service. I lived with 3 murderers and countless criminals..... ...but I have never met a bad American!

You must have faith in the best in people and distrust the worst. If not, the worst will prevail. – Jose Marti

1978 - With my co-worker for almost 60 years, Tony Harris, in Oslo Concert House

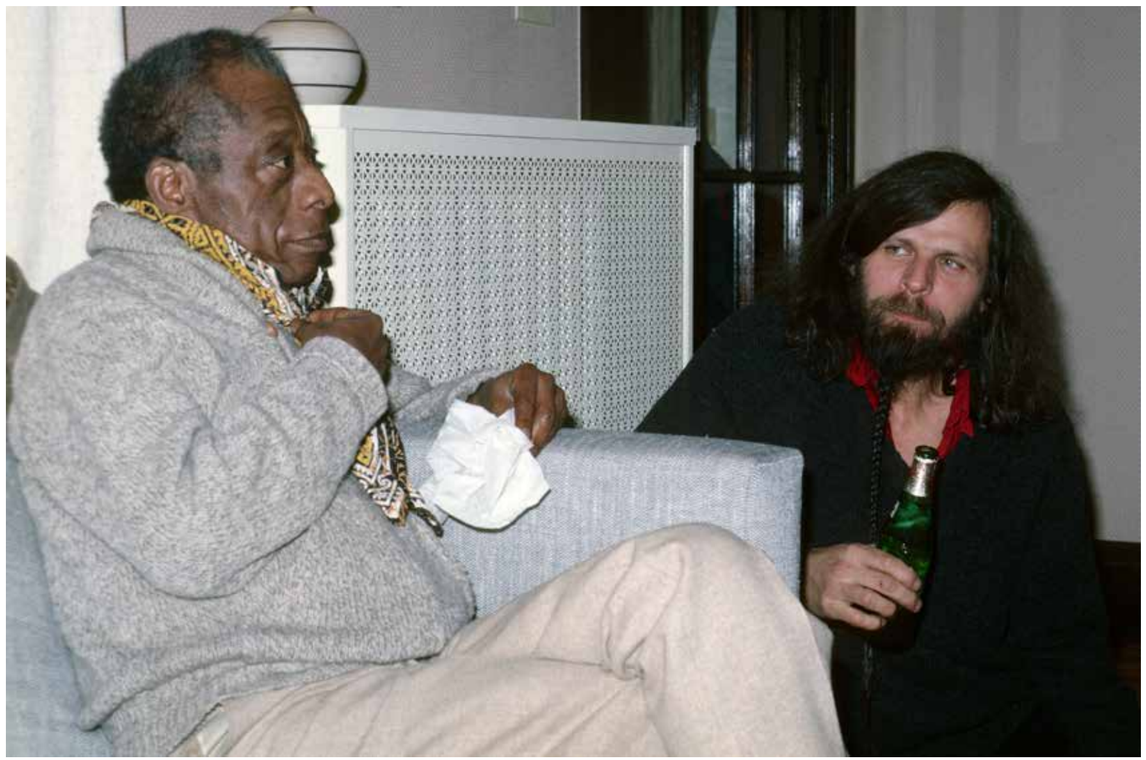
The introduction to the slideshow "American Pictures"

Part One:

Roots of oppression

"The legacy of slavery and segregation isn't just a thing of the past. It's woven into the fabric of American society, and it continues to shape our lives in profound ways." - Jesmyn Ward

"The past is all that makes the present coherent, and further, the past will remain horrible for exactly as long as we refuse to assess it honestly." - James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time



1987 – I was delighted by Baldwin's enthusiasm for American Pictures, because I had to admit that I never had time to read his books during the years when I was busy "reading the people around me." It was only when I later read his books that I gained a better understanding of the people I had photographed.

1973 – I arrived in the US six years after the Civil Rights Act was passed, but even nine years later, I could still see the physical traces of Jim Crow laws, like here in St. Francisville, LA. But when will the mental traces disappear, my lifelong friend Morgan Pate seen here and I kept asking ourselves.

Learning the hard way to survive through “preventive forgiveness”

“Healing begins where the wound was made.” — Alice Walker, The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart

“If we’re gonna heal, we gotta feel. And we can’t heal if we’re afraid.” - Beyoncé

A hundred years before me, my Danish predecessor, Jacob A. Riis, used “shock and awe” to introduce his illustrated “slide shows” to society’s better-off citizens “Let me take you by the hand,” he said, “and lead you down into the abyss to meet the other half.” Here is the brief story of how I myself ended up making what the New York Post called “Jacob Holdt’s postcards from Hell.”

In my youth in Denmark, I was radicalized by the United States’ endless wars in Vietnam and against democracy in other poor countries, where it overthrew democratically elected governments and supported bloody dictatorships. After vandalizing U.S. Army equipment during a NATO exercise, I had to flee to a farm in Canada, where I was left alone to read books about American “imperialism,” which in my loneliness radicalized me even more. I began to search blindly for more just (utopian) systems. After a year I decided to hitchhike to Guatemala, whose elected government had been overthrown by the US, and become a guerrilla. A bit naive since two years earlier I’d been kicked out of the Royal Danish Palace Guard for refusing to shoot at human-shaped targets and I spoke no Spanish. I had to cross the US on the way and landed in San Francisco on the first day. In order to find a place to stay, I thought I’d go around asking people, and the first I met was a black guy who offered me his bed because he had to write a math paper for university that night. “Fine, I’ll come back tonight,” I said, since I wanted to see a bit of this beautiful city before heading south. But it was in the middle of the Haight Ashbury hippie era, and before long I was getting a lot of offers from young women in Indian skirts—I’d never been invited home in Canada and certainly not by women. Suddenly, in this land of plenty, it was a matter of picking and choosing, which soon gave me democratic guilt—because it’s so easy as a young person to pick the young and discriminate against the old, as a white person to pick the white and discriminate against the black, as a heterosexual to pick the heterosexual and discriminate against the LGBT. I hadn’t thought of the latter, though, because (perhaps for the same reason) I had never known a gay person in rural Denmark.

So before the day was over, I came to the conclusion that the only way to get a fully representative picture of what goes on in a society without ghettoizing anyone is to let others choose for you by saying yes to the first person who invites you. So my “yes” philosophy was born on my first day in the US, and I decided late in the evening to go back to the black guy even though he was the most boring guy I’d met all day and the one I least wanted to stay with.

And yes, I got his bed while he was doing math all night in the small dorm room. But suddenly I woke up with something hard pressed into me while I was sleeping on my stomach, and he was holding my arms. It was a very painful rape, which I won’t go into detail about, and which I was ashamed to tell anyone about for the next 40 years.

The next morning, he looked very remorseful and asked if we were still good friends. “Yes, of course we are. And thank you for sheltering me,” I replied. Then he seemed completely relieved and asked me to come with him to the service at his church. It was a day I will never forget. For here in the Glide Church, with Cecil Williams, its charismatic black pastor, he led me, like a saving angel, into a whole new form of religious devotion to humanity that gradually de-radicalized me. Not by putting my trust in higher ideological systems, but by surrendering to the individual human being here on earth, as he appears in all his pain and anger.

On my fifth day in America, my new yes philosophy led me to my next “shock and awe” ordeal: I was attacked and robbed by a gun-wielding black gang. This mishap opened up a whole, previously unknown underworld created and maintained by external violence. In order to survive, I have since learned to integrate through ”preventive forgiveness” with this underworld.

It was to become a lifelong journey that would lead to American Pictures, and exactly 11 years later we were having a big party, with many invited guests and media, at the opening of American Pictures’ first theater in San Francisco. Suddenly, during the party, a slightly nervous black man approached me and asked whether I remembered him.I had no idea who he was. “Well, you stayed with me in 1971,” he said. My memory was still a black hole. But then, whispering in front of everyone, he began to describe our relationship on that seminal night, and I realized that he was the one who had raped me on my first night in America. I was so excited that I spontaneously gave him a big hug and shouted: “Thank you for American Pictures! Without you and your redeeming gift, American Pictures would never have been made. Now I have returned with our work as a gift to the country you opened for me.”

By then I had long since realized that his and the muggers’ violent cry for help—here on earth—had saved my life by derailing my youthful fanaticism and the ideological belief that only by dying for others can humans be saved (as part of a higher violent struggle to create “the new man”). By giving me a mutually emancipating belief in the goodness of humanity in the midst of all its pain and anger, he had been my protective traveling companion through my many years of adventurous journeying through the “roots of oppression,” just as was the dead man for the penniless John in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale “The Traveling Companion.”

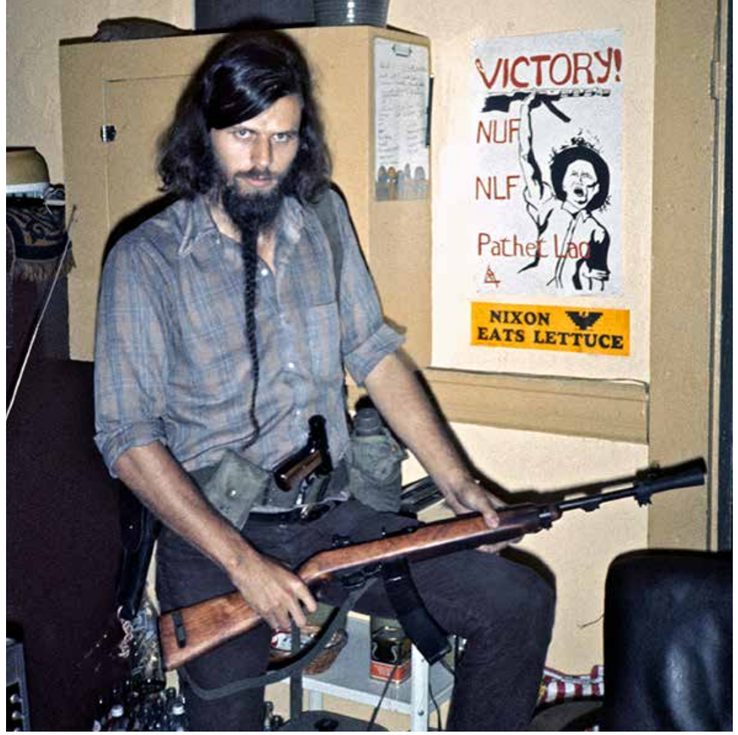
But as I later learned as a lecturer, watching the courageous soul struggles of my students, it can take a long time to break out of our fixed frames of understanding, and for a long time I resisted. Although I was moved by the suffering in northern ghettos in my first year and wanted to understand their roots, after watching horror movies like Easy Rider (where longhairs were gunned down) and after internalizing Northern prejudice against the South I was too overwhelmed by fear to go to the South. At the same time, feeling that I had betrayed my solidarity with the oppressed in Guatemala, I ironically decided to hitchhike throughout Guatemala, first training myself to overcome my fear and wearing a short-haired wig because longhairs, associated with guerrillas, were shot by the military.

Fortunately, I never found the guerrillas, but while in the jungle I found an issue of Time magazine that said there would be big demonstrations in Miami against Nixon’s Republican convention—Nixon was the man who’d started the bloody repression in Guatemala. Unable to get a banana boat from Puerto Barrios to Miami, I was forced—furious at Nixon—to hitchhike the 6,000 kilometers there, up through Mexico and right through the heart of the Deep South. Even though I’d been in the middle of a bloody guerrilla war, I still remember how scared I was to return to the US. But after 6 days of hitchhiking, I landed safely in the belly of the beast, Nixon’s headquarters in the Hotel Fontainebleau. Wearing my short-haired wig, I managed to share a room with one of his Republican delegates. After being arrested several times by the Secret Service when they saw me change into long hair to join the long-haired Vietnam protesters outside, I finally made friends with a Secret Service officer. “My own son has long hair,” he said, “and feels the way you do.” Later, I was arrested and was about to be deported from the US when I used the pass he gave me and with the help of an Australian journalist, unfurled a large banner in the Convention Center during the President’s speech. It read “Nixon Kills Babies”—not least because I’d just seen many children in Guatemala who died as a result of the bloody military regime installed by Nixon.

So after this long detour, I’d passed the acid test and to my surprise overcome my fear of the South by standing in the middle of it.

Once again, I learned how rewarding it is to overcome your prejudices. From then on I did my best to find and understand the deeper historical roots of the oppression of black people, which I had already experienced in the North.

So the first part of the book is my account of the “roots of oppression” and how I came to love the South, whose people reminded me in so many ways of rural West Jutland, which had done so much to shape me as a child.



1972 – in the underground movement around St. Louis, MO

1972 – i Guatemala med korthårsparyk og falsk skæg

1974 - Bartow, FL. Charles Smith's hands

Voices Across the Sea: An Echo of Stolen Lives

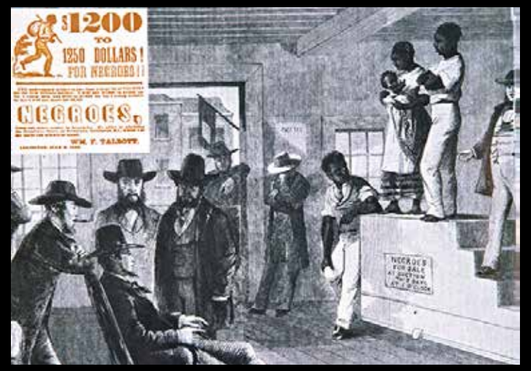
"The sea carries the weight of our ancestors. It remembers the horror, but also the resilience."
- Octavia Butler

Important!
The song *Ship Ahoy* by *The O'Jays* illustrated

Ekko af fangenskab:
En rejse gennem tid og arv

Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy!
As far as your eye can see,
men, women, and baby slaves
coming to the land of Liberty,
where life's design is already made.
So young and so strong
they're just waiting to be saved....
Lord, I'm so tired
and I know you're tired too,
look over the horizon,
see the sun
shining down on you...

Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy!
Can't you feel the motion of the ocean,
can't you feel the cold wind blowing by?
There's so many fish in the sea,
we're just, we're just, we're just
riding on the waves...
the waves... the waves...



Hitchhiking Through History – all the way back to slavery

"I was born in slavery time - when was it? I don't know. I can't tell you nothing about it. All I know is, I wukked in de fields and I wukked hard." - Harriet Smith, Hempstead, Texas

I'd thought that slavery was far back in history, but in Florida I met Charles Smith, who claimed to be 134 years old and to clearly remember being enslaved in Africa.
- I come to the United States, when I was only twelve years old.
- Were you sold as a slave to the U.S.A.?
- Yeah, wait let me tell you now. They brought me from Africa... That was in slavery time. I had never seen a white person in Africa. Well, I asked my mama, could I go down to the boat and see the white man. She said yeah, and I ain't seen mama since. Grown people carried the children on hoard to see the "sugar trees" down in the hatch-holes. We felt the boat was moving, but thought it was the wind. He never did bring us back. We never saw the sugar trees. The colored wanted to throw me off. I remember it as if it was yesterday. Legree, the captain on the boat, didn't want me thrown off. We got into this country, and were sold in New Orleans. Put up on a block and bid off. The highest bidder won...

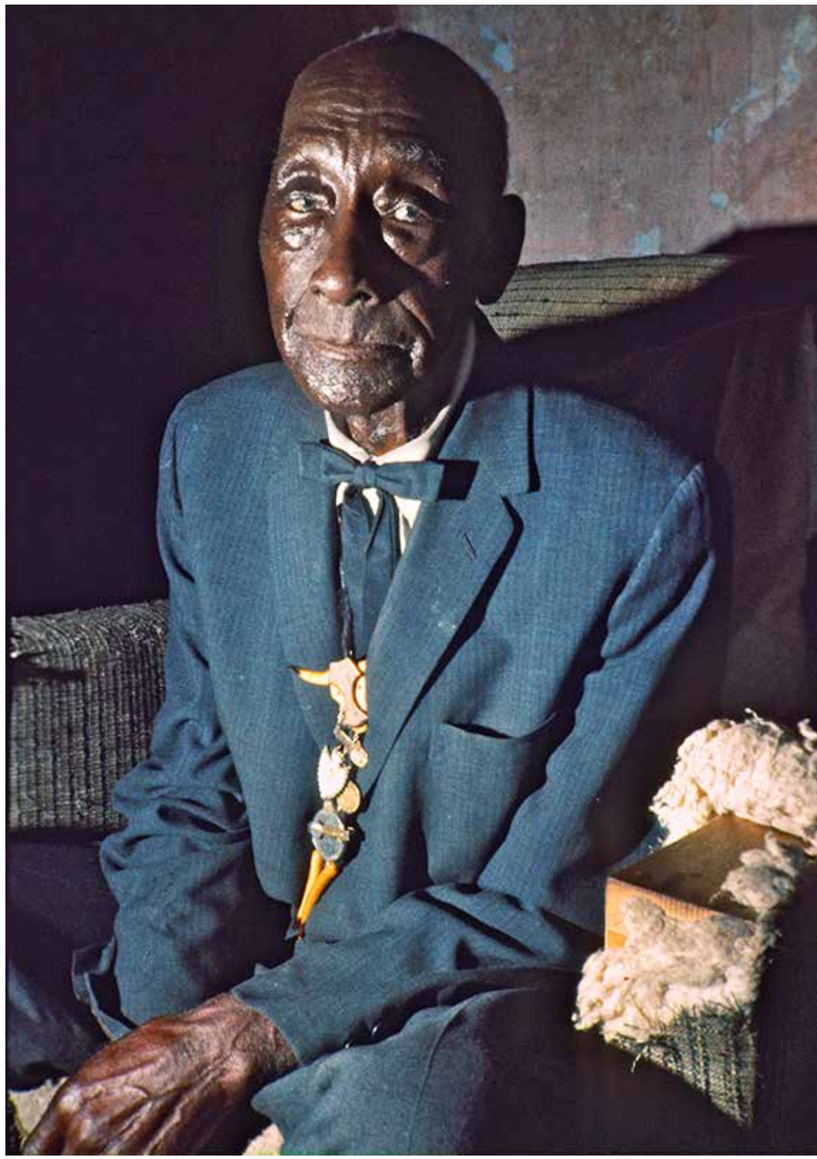
A black social worker who'd picked me up and seen my pictures while I was vagabonding in Florida had told me about Charles Smith and brought me to his little house. Both he and other blacks in the area told me that Smith considered himself different from other blacks and in fact looked down on them.
Smith had been too young to understand why the older Africans would throw him overboard, which according to historians was quite common in order to save the children from slavery. When he was bought by a Texas farmer in 1854, he was already too old to be brought up as a slave and suffer the inner scarring slaves do when, to avoid cruel punishment or death at the least sign of resistance, they are forced to be submissive.

Although Charles Smith probably confused his father's story with his own, it's a poignant description of the fate of millions of other captured Africans.

I discovered that this submissive behavior as a survival tactic still plagues black Americans, and it struck me that, if slavery has left such deep psychic scars, true freedom had not yet been achieved. Having learned that the United States finally became a democracy in the 1960s, when all citizens were given the right to vote, I am surprised that even today, 60 years later, a quarter of the population in the South is still illiterate. Isn't it the duty of a democracy to educate its citizens?

1974 - Bartow, FL. Charles Smith - the year after the BBC made a film about his long life, and I saw newspaper clippings on his wall announcing that he had been named an honorary citizen of Los Angeles. In my long tape-recorded interview with him, he impressed me by correctly recounting the presidents of his lifetime and how old he was when the first cars came out. But after 2008, doubts arose as to whether he remembered his age correctly.

My interview above with Charles Smith



1974 - Bartow, FL. Charles Smith

A Short Journey Back to the Civil Rights Movement

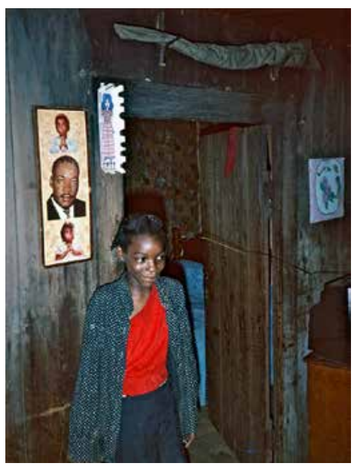
- and My Later Work With the King Family

"Dr. King's noble dream has degenerated into a cliche, a catchphrase, like "diversity," a way out of - as opposed to a way into - a complex and textured conversations about race. At best, what the civil rights movement appears to have produced is a generation that is keen to look beyond race, but finds on the other side not freedom but a riddle. The riddle of race, something you see but must always pretend not to see." —Emily Bernard, Black Is the Body: Stories from My Grandmother's Time

Years before my arrival, Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement had already changed the most overt and primitive forms of discrimination. But the most significant part of his dream went to the grave with him: *"I have a dream, that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream, that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged on the color of their skin, but on the content of their character. I have a dream, that one day every valley shall be exalted and every hill and mountain made low..."*
Martin Luther King's beautiful dreams are shared by me and most other whites. In my journey, however, I soon learned, that the only one that came true may be that African Americans are no longer judged on their skin color but on their character. The sad thing is that the character traits blacks developed after centuries of oppression don't live up to the norms of whites, whose character traits and economic "hills" are shaped by being oppressors. Seeing how much African American character traits differ from those of both whites and black immigrants helped me understand the enormous subjugation of the mind that slavery and our continued exclusion of blacks are causing. For to ostracize and make other people feel unloved is to commit violence against their humanity. That our language of violence today is not only understood but also spoken by those who have had to hear it for centuries should come as no surprise.
"I'd like to commend Jacob Holdt ... for making this significant event possible. It's always refreshing to know that my father's birthday is being recognized and celebrated all over the world. As an African American, I'm flattered by the interest the youth of Denmark have shown in our culture. African Americans have a lot to be proud of, and we appreciate your recognition of our accomplishments. By the same token, there are some African Americans who have adopted some behaviors that we are not proud of, and we feel ashamed and embarrassed of. The most prevalent of these characteristics is violence against one another."
- Yolanda King in her speech to an event we organized to "Stop the Violence" after we together made a presentation of my pictures to President Clinton in the Kennedy Performing Art Center.

Historical photo from Florida

1975 – Tuskegee, AL


1975 - Texas

I have a dream illustrated with more of my photos

2005 – New Jersey

2015 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, Washington DC.

1975 - Martin Luther King Sr., Coretta King, and Bernice King

1975 – Beaumont, TX

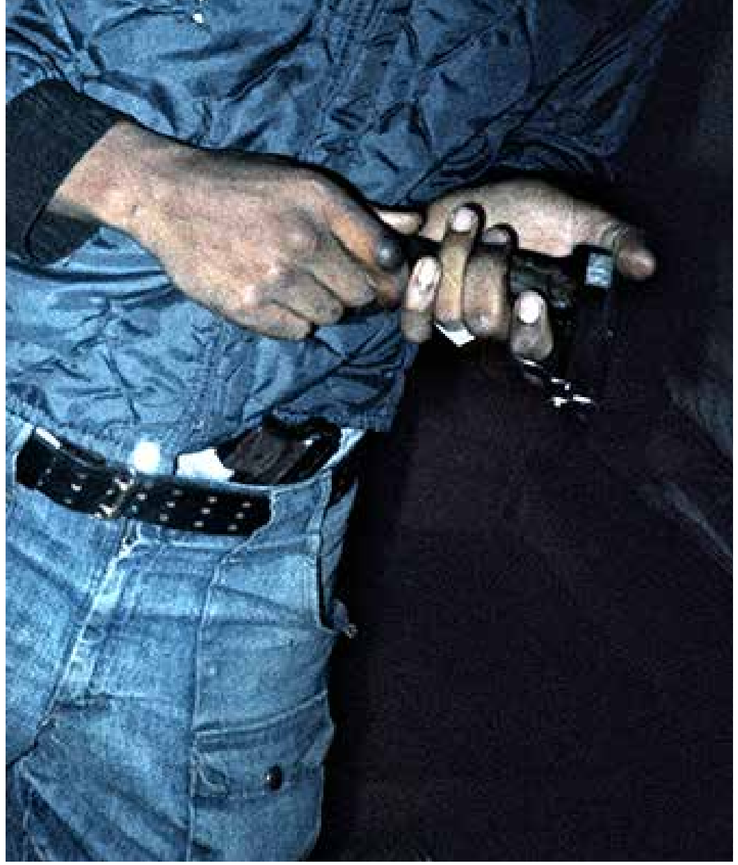
1995 - Queens, NY, from the funeral of Simon, the fifth member of Lela's family I witnessed being murdered. Right side: 1972 - New York, 1973 - Norfolk, VA, and 1987 - Harlem

Where did all the anger come from?

...so what's in store?
i'm talking about race war!
"Get yourself together"
"Open your eyes, get wise"
Race war....people getting killed in the streets
blood on your feet
the ends don't meet,
and who're they going to blame it on, me?

Where did WE go wrong?

Try the media, try the PD, try your TV,
anybody but yourself.
But once the bullets starts flying
people starts dying
its all because of lying
history books they teach hate
I did have no escape from the racist faith
it's like South Africa, we'll start killing
race war, race war, race war, race war, race war...



Echoes of Violence: The Intergenerational Toll of Oppression

"The trauma of that history lives in our bodies, in our minds, in the way we interact with the world." - Nikole Hannah-Jones

But when, like me, you came from Europe and had, for instance, never seen a pistol, you receive a shock you'll never forget the first time you hear the tone of this language. After only a few days in this new country, I was held up by gunmen—a character type I'd never met.

Similarly, the fear I felt was a fear I'd never experienced before: the fear of another human being.

My journey afterward became to a large degree a journey into this human being. And the more I came to understand and like this human being, the more I began to see how I myself could have caused this anger in an oppressive system which from day one had forced me and other immigrants onto the side of the oppressor whether, as a Danish tourist, I'd wanted it or not. Could I, through my behavior, even be the cause of this anger? Could I ever myself end up harboring such anger?

From the day I experienced that violent American reality, I began to understand the extent to which fear and anger characterize the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed.

Excepts from the song *Race war* by Ice-T

James 5: 1-6 (Woe to the wealthy)

Riding the Underground Railroad with Rolls Royce

"The Underground Railroad is bigger than its operators and passengers. It's this great American spirit of resistance, this idea that we can be better than we are, that we can fight against the systems designed to oppress us." – Colson Whitehead, author of "The Underground Railroad,"

In New Orleans, I lived with a black murderer named Nell. Like the other murderers I have known, he was an ordinary person who had become a murderer by accident or because of his social background. Of course, it took him some time to tell me about his past since he had escaped from a prison in Nevada and was a wanted man, but like other criminals, he had a need to share what was weighing on him with another human being he could trust. No one can live alone with such a heavy burden. We lived with a few other people on the east side of New Orleans, and Nell tried to live as normal and respectable a life as circumstances allowed. Knowing that he would be sent back to prison for the rest of his life if he got involved in anything, he tried to stay away from crime as much as possible and made his living primarily as a blood donor. I did not think his chances of remaining free for the rest of his life were very good, but I tried hard to make his breathing space of freedom as happy and encouraging as possible. I felt that he had already been punished enough by the poverty and humiliation society had subjected him to in his childhood, before he committed any crime.

When I expressed this opinion during one of our nightly conversations, he confided in me about his crime, and after that we were bound even more closely by this secret trust. We often went for walks or to the blood bank together. Most of the time, we could survive by selling plasma twice a week since the New Orleans blood banks were the highest-paying in the U.S. at the time: $6.10 per visit. Only on rare occasions was I forced to steal cheese and other small items from supermarkets to feed myself. I did not want Nell to do this because he could end up in prison for life, while I, with my white privilege, knew that if I got caught, I could talk my way out of such an embarrassing situation with the clerks. Nell was always haunted by his fate, but never did I realize this as clearly as the last night I saw him.

We had made the stupid mistake of walking down the street together in the black neighborhood where we lived and attracted the attention of the police. It is a mortal sin for a white man and a black man to walk together in a black neighborhood, as they are immediately suspected of being drug dealers. But since we were deep in conversation when we entered the neighborhood, we forgot to separate. Before long, a patrol car pulled up next to us on one of the dimly lit streets of the East Side. The cops were the nice jovial type who really just wanted to scare us, so they told us we could go free if we just gave them our marijuana cigarettes. I've seen the police use this method so many times in black neighborhoods because they don't have to report the pot they confiscate; they can smoke it themselves. I had nothing on me, but I knew that Nell had a joint or two, like most people. But suddenly Nell was seized by the paranoia of his fate—the paranoia and distrust of his fellow man that almost everyone of his social background has—and he refused to give up the joints. For my part, I would not have hesitated for a moment. I had complete faith in the cops. Nell's mistrust of the cops caused him to shut down and act irrationally. The police are trained to observe this kind of reaction in criminals, and they immediately got out of the car to search him. They only found two small joints and his knife, but since he had no ID, they took him to the station for fingerprinting. I knew then that I would never see Nell again. He had been tripped up by the paranoia and guilt common to all poor black people, whether they have committed a crime or not. It was the same paranoia that had made him a murderer in the first place.

After Nell left "this world," New Orleans suddenly seemed like a ghost town, and I could no longer bear to stay in the same house. I wanted to get out of the city, so I tried to hitchhike to Baton Rouge. New Orleans is one of the hardest places in America to get a ride, and I waited for hours on the interstate with my sign, hoping to get picked up before the police came. Suddenly, the only Rolls Royce I've ever gotten a ride in stopped in the middle of the three-lane highway to pick me up. It was the middle of rush hour and we immediately created a huge traffic jam of honking cars. As soon as I got into the car, the police came up behind us and gave us a ticket for stopping illegally. The man who had picked me up said he would take care of it, went back to the cops, and without a word gave them his card. When the cops saw his name, they became all smiles and friendliness and followed him back to his Rolls Royce, patting him on the back and assuring him that it was just a small thing and we shouldn't worry about it anymore. Naturally, I wondered who this guy could be who got off so easily without even a ticket. He told me that his name was Wayne A. Karmgard and that he had picked me up because I was standing with my "Touring USA from Denmark" sign. He had never picked up a hitchhiker before but suddenly thought it might be fun since he was of Danish descent.

1974 - Palm Beach, FL

Normally, this information would cause me to shut up and get out of the car as quickly as possible. I have long since lost any desire to be around Danish-Americans, who all too often leave me with only one feeling: a sense of shame at being Danish. My advice to Danes visiting America is that if you want to get a good impression of the country, stay away from this population, which is often one of the most racist and reactionary white groups in the United States. 80 percent of them vote Republican, I have heard. All they can talk about is how wonderful it is to be free of high taxes in Denmark. They flee from any human responsibility to get their taxes lowered. I have met Danish-Americans who were "red-hot" Social Democrats back home in Denmark, but who in just 5 years have turned into the darkest reactionaries. Danish-Americans stand in stark contrast to American Jews, who are the only white group with whom I feel a strong harmony. This group has a very deep understanding of the conditions of the blacks and the social mechanisms that have made them the "negroes" of Europe for so many centuries.

Still, I could not say no to a Danish-American in a Rolls Royce. I immediately began to entertain him with travel stories so that he would invite me home. I especially emphasized my experiences with Rockefeller and Kennedy, because all little millionaires look up to the big millionaires. I knew he would invite me home, feeling that it would bring him a little closer to the Rockefellers. It worked, and I ended up going back to New Orleans. He owned the finest and most expensive hotel in town, right in the heart of the French Quarter. Everybody in town knew him, and I later learned that he owned much of the French Quarter and was a real estate speculator (slumlord). I was given a fabulous suite in his hotel, the Maison de Ville, and told to ring the bell whenever I wanted anything. Black waiters in freshly pressed uniforms served me everything on silver trays with excessive servility. I sat in the garden of the hotel and had a black waiter bring me one thing after another, trying to get him to open up, but it was impossible. He probably felt his whole existence threatened when I spoke to him as a normal human being. I sat there thinking how strange it was that at that very moment Nell was being "served" by white prison guards in hell, while I was being served by black waiters in heaven. It was as if everything in our lives had naturally led us to our respective places, and our brief friendship was just a glimpse of utopia. But it struck me that Nell, as a black man, had actually come further, for wasn't he more free than this broken servant who could only hold his head up by learning to enjoy his own oppression here in this rich Dane's sadomasochistic universe? Wasn't Karmgard a powerful oppressor, while at the same time he seemed to be a gentle, quiet, and unhappy man who had learned to take full advantage of the mechanisms given to him in this society? Moreover, he was said to be the richest homosexual in the city, which meant that he himself was part of an oppressed minority. Was it not the same insecurity as a vulnerable minority that had driven him into this unfortunate position, as had driven many Jews in Europe into similar economic security throughout the ages?

The security of this environment was sickening. I felt restless and lonely. It was a favorite hotel of the richest and most glamorous movie stars, but there was no human contact. Should I go out on the street and find a poor person to share my luxurious suite and a bottle of wine with? No, one should not buy friendship with wealth, I thought. Not even borrowed wealth. I stayed there only one night, a terribly lonely night.

For years I had shared homes and beds with people, and it was a shock to suddenly find myself alone. After my silver-tray bre-

1973 - New Orleans

1973 - Natchez, MS - My servant Earline Gaynes - and later lifelong friend

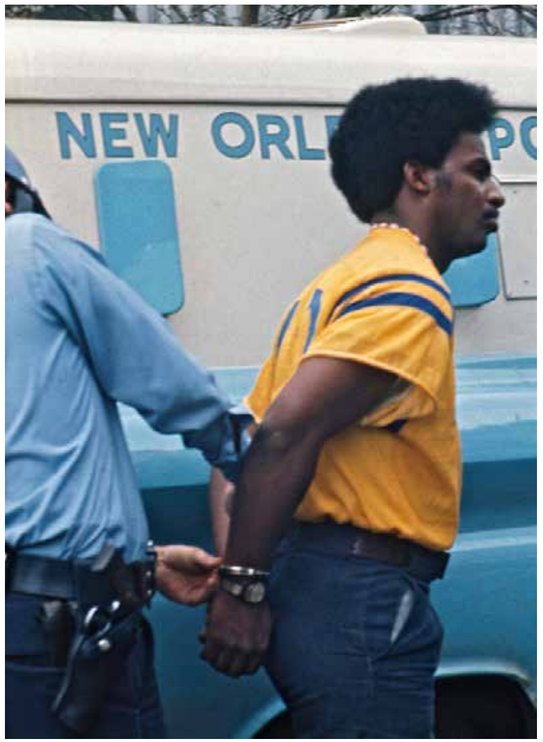
akfast the next day, I rushed back to freedom, determined to find some people to live with. On Bourbon Street, two young girls came running up to me to get my autograph. As tourists, they had gone to the famous hotel out of curiosity, seen me sitting under the palm trees having breakfast, and assumed I was a movie star. For a moment I was tempted to play "movie star" and maybe get to stay with them, but then I decided to tell the truth. Then they lost all interest in me and I realized that I was back down to earth. Because of the many tourists, it is impossible for a vagabond to find a place to stay in New Orleans.

Toward evening I was very hungry and remembered Bonnie's Grill on Decatur Street that Nell had once shown me. Bonnie was an enormously fat white woman who ran a dingy little coffee bar. Bonnie was the kind of person who could only talk to people in coarse, ill-tempered terms, and she was always yelling at them, but the harder she talked to people, the more she loved them. She could have easily made good money from the cafe, but instead she was always broke because the place was frequented by the poorest street people, and Bonnie gave free meals all day long to people who had no money. Bonnie remembered me and knew I had no money, so she immediately pushed a big bowl of grits in front of me, and later hamburgers and other goodies. She stood there in all her glory with her hands on her hips and watched me without saying a word, but I knew she liked me because I had known Nell.

Without mentioning Nell, she said after a long silence: "You can live with me now." So I moved into Bonnie's shabby and cluttered apartment. There were lice and fleas and several inches of dust everywhere.

What happened over the next few days was strange because even though we could barely communicate and were not sexually involved, we quickly became closer than I had been with any other person on my journey. When we realized that we were probably the only ones to whom Nell had confided her past, we became inseparable. Living with Bonnie has been like living on a volca-

1973 - Natchez, MS



1973 - New Orleans, LA

no of human warmth. She is the only one I know who still runs the "Underground Railroad." Living with her meant being woken up almost every night by a black man on the run from the law. They all found refuge here. Bonnie loved black men, especially those who had rebelled against the master-slave relationship in one way or another. She had always been like that. She had lived in Jacksonville, Florida, but had been beaten and run out of town by the whites. She had gone to New Orleans, which is considered a freer city in the South.

Her own two children were neglected and needed clothes, healthy food, and vitamins; but on the other hand, they had been raised by their mother's actions not to hate and were, in their own way, far healthier than most white children. Throughout their childhood they had seen murderers, thieves, rapists, junkies, and other criminals take their father's place in their mother's bed, but they had experienced them all as human beings because they had seen them through their mother's eyes. Bonnie refused to accept and see only their oppressed identities, and through this deeper belief in human beings, actually created human beings. For these children, terms like "murderer" and "nigger" had no meaning because in Bonnie's home, the men all acted like their "daddy," and that was how the children saw them. There was always cheering when a "daddy" got out of jail. Bonnie sighed a little because they would never see Nell again, but she was ready to take in a new Nell. Bonnie and I developed a quiet understanding and affection for each other that grew over the years into such a strong love relationship that I kept coming back to New Orleans to live with her. Bonnie does not know if she is Jewish or Danish or Irish or Polish. She is just American, she says.

Excerpts from original letters in my early primitive style

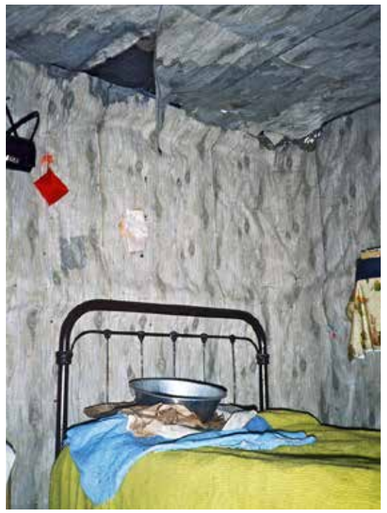
PS—I've left my stereotypical, time-worn generalizations about certain minorities here as a counterbalance to Bonnie's true American attitude, which was a direct precursor to Obama's election.

My time travel back to 200 years of white cotton tyranny

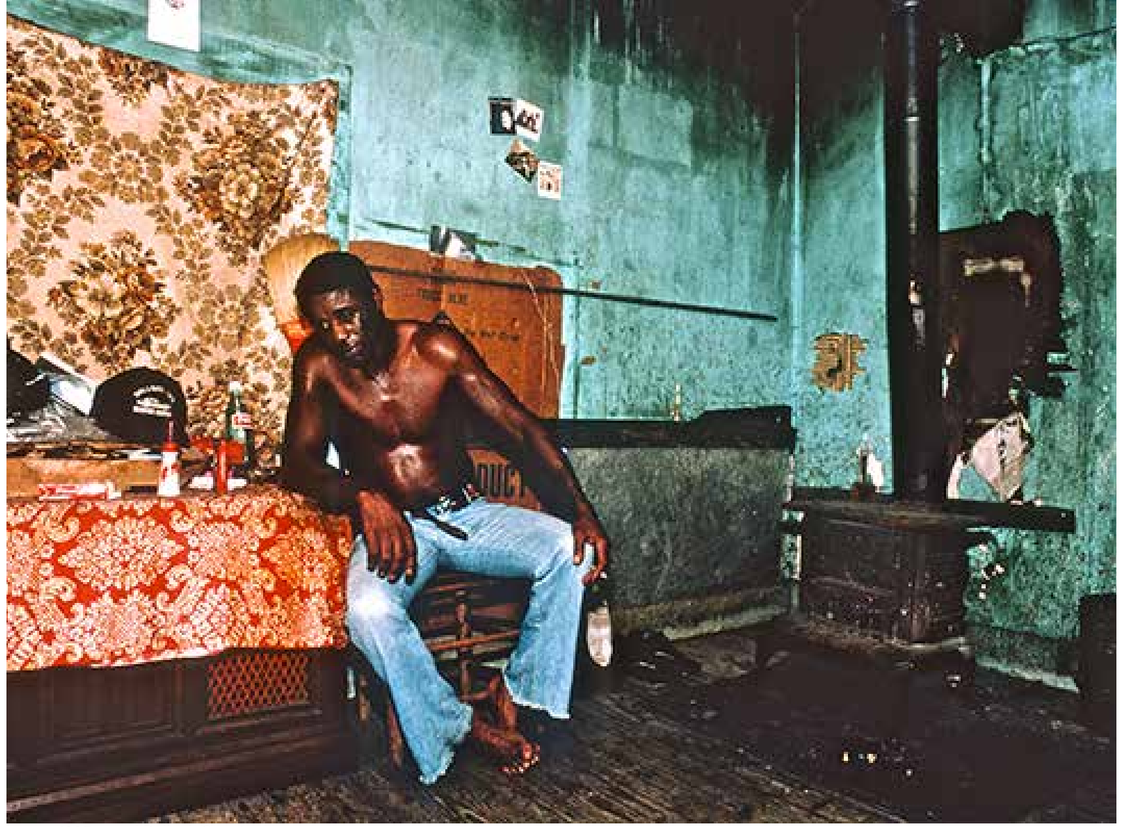
"Cotton and blood were mingled on many a field where the dead and dying lay close beside the hoed rows and the falling bolls." - Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom

"The cotton field was our world, and the rows stretched endlessly north and south, like the seams of our history." Ralph Ellison, "Invisible Man"

On my way to Florida in the winter, I discovered where this fear and hostility, which blossomed into my terrifying encounter in the Northern streets, had its roots. Few blacks today pick cotton, but meeting those still trapped behind the cotton curtain, in the midst of the affluent society of the 1970s, seemed so surreal that I immediately felt thrown back in history—smothered by the cotton whose white tyranny once shrouded all black life in the South.



1973 - Allendale County, SC all photos



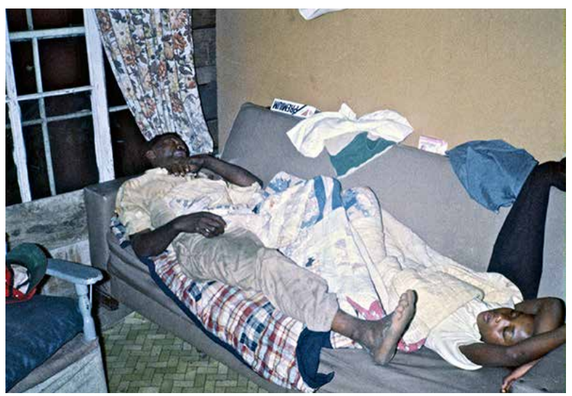
1995 - rural Bullock County, AL

1975 - rural Macon County AL

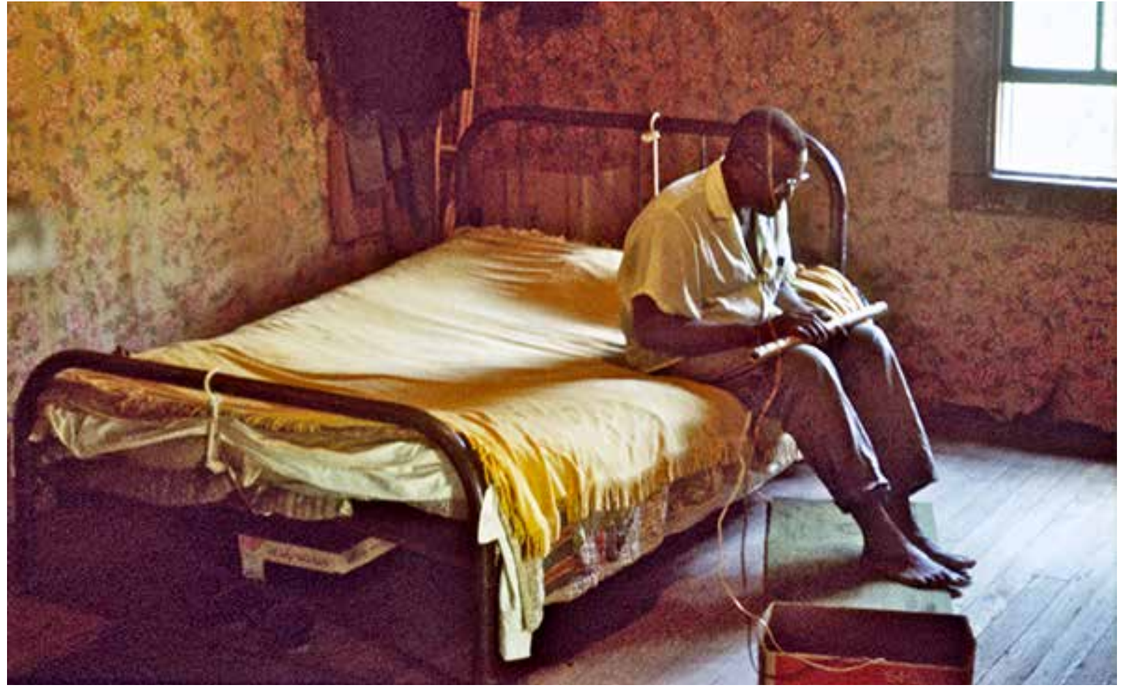
1975 - Edgecombe County, NC

1975 - rural Edgecombe County, NC

1974 - Washington, NC



1974 - Apopka, FL



1978 - Bullock County, AL

1973 - Allendale County, SC

1975 - Waynesboro GA

"Cotton is king, and we are the slaves. We pick the cotton, but we never see the money. We live in the shacks, but we never own the land. We work in the sun, but we never feel the warmth." - Richard Wright, Black Boy

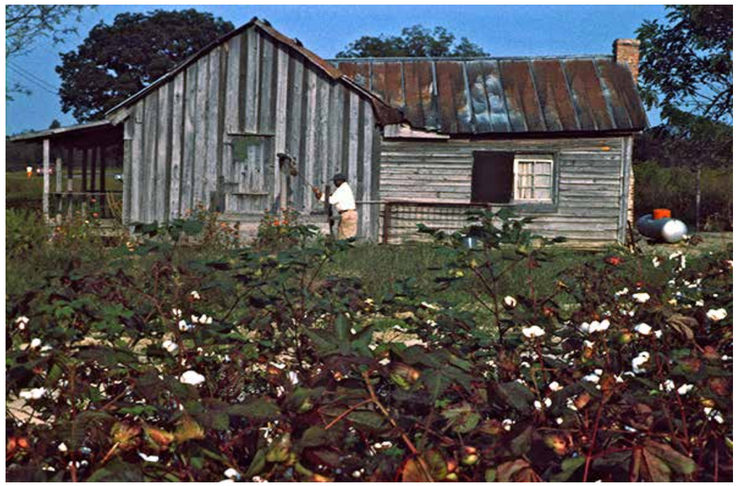
When I worked in the cotton fields, I discovered that reality was quite different from the one suggested in the historical photos and caricatures I recalled of smiling, almost childishly happy cotton pickers. The smiles in this picture were in fact the only ones I saw on the cotton plantations—when one of the pickers couldn't figure out how my camera worked.

It took me a long time to overcome their hostility and fear of me as a white, but in the end I got to stay with Martha and Joe in return for giving them all the cotton I picked. Though I toiled from morning to night and was aching all over, I never succeeded in picking more than four dollars' worth a day. The others were more experienced and could make over six dollars a day. This was relatively the same as today, where I see Martha and many of the others working for Walmart and still unable to pull themselves up by the bootstraps.

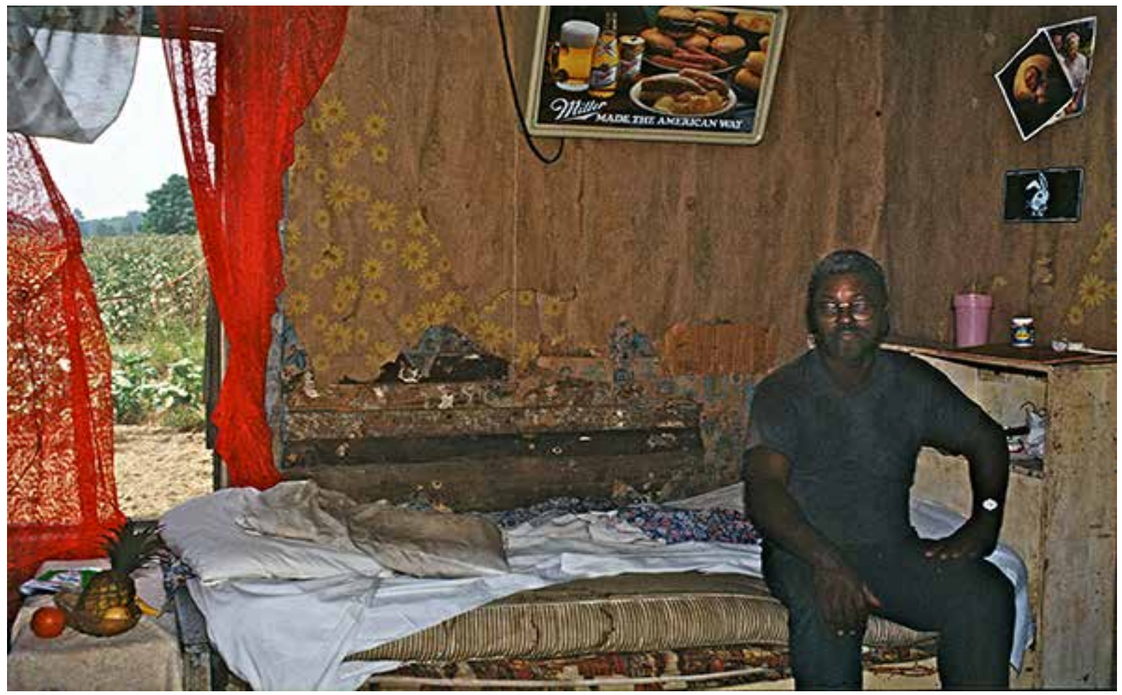
The harvesting machines drove them out of the fields, but worse, in the years since, I have seen the independent black farmers lose their land because they couldn't get loans for the same costly machines as the white-owned industrial farms, which received government subsidies. Subsidies now average $2.1 billion a year, or 50 percent of the actual value of the crop. The reason? To avoid cheap, imported, hand-picked cotton from farmers in India and Africa. Again, this is a form of racism that harms and excludes the poor.

And so, for the brief moment when I was paid four cents a pound for piecework, I felt both ashamed of my privilege and proud to feel some of the pain of the long history of exploitation that had shaped millions of black lives. . The white landowner would then sell the harvest for 72 cents a pound.

2004 - rural Arkansas

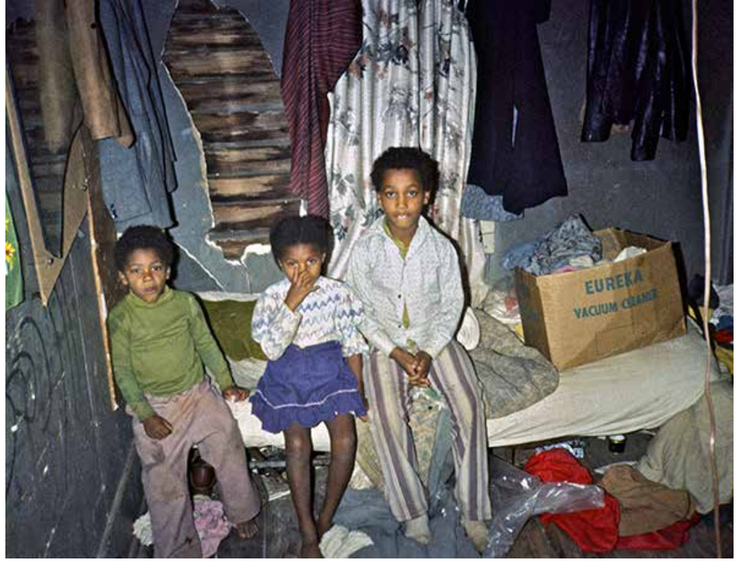


1996 - rural Selma, AL

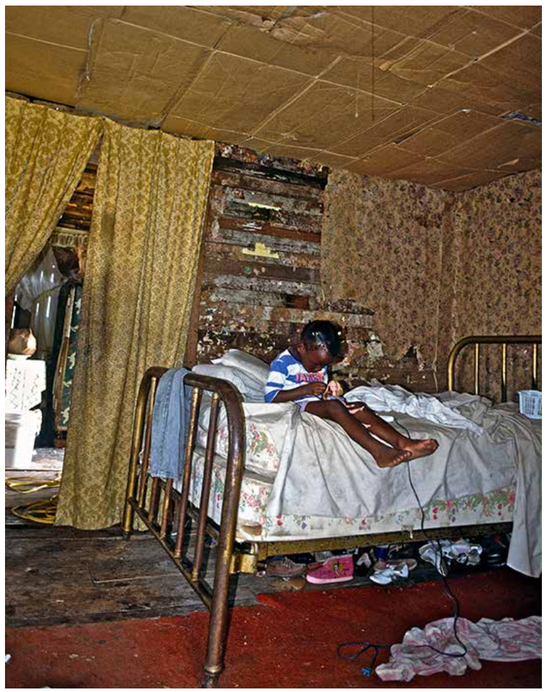


1996 - cotton picker in rural Selma, AL

I began to understand how the landowner could afford to live in a large white mansion while his black pickers lived in shacks. At quitting time the son of the landlord arrived to weigh the cotton and pay us on the spot. We were exhausted and there was no joy in receiving the money, which could hardly be stretched to cover kerosene for the lamp at home in the shack, which was probably no bigger or better than the ones the slaves originally lived in. How could these people be called free when everything around them reminded them of the old master-slave relationship?



1973 - Zebulon, NC



1996 - rural Selma, AL

1974 - rural Elizabethtown NC

1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Alachua, FL

1975 - rural Meridian, MS

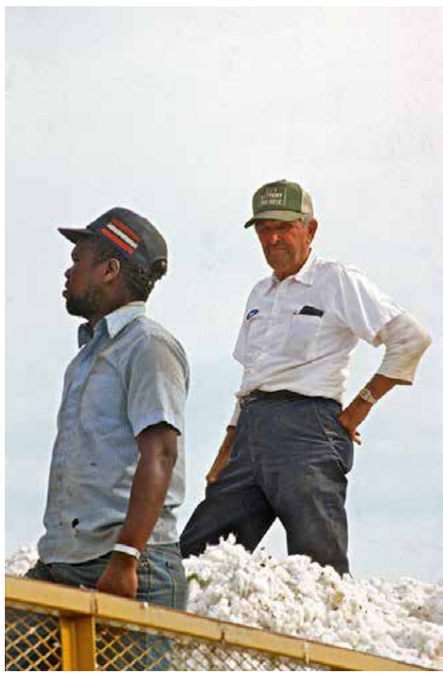
1973 - Allendale County, SC both photos

Shackles of the Soul: The Enduring Grip of Cotton

"Cotton is the fabric of our lives, but also the fabric of our oppression. It connects us to the past and the present, to the rich and the poor, to the land and the water. It is a thread that binds us, but also tears us apart." - Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns

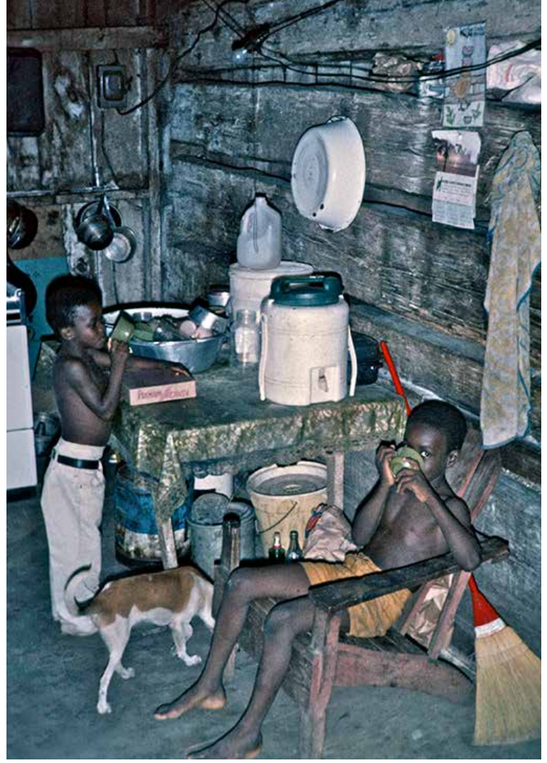
Slave driver
The tables are turned now
catch a fire
you're going to get burned now.
Every time I hear the crack of the whip
my blood run cold
I do remember on a slave ship
how they brutalized my very soul.
Today they say
that we are free
only to be chained in this poverty!
Good God
I think it's illiteracy
it's only a machine that makes money.

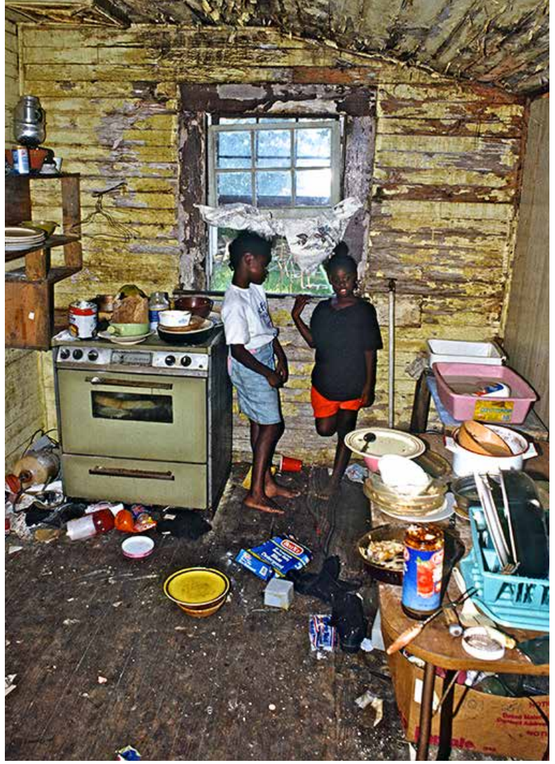
A century earlier whites had believed it their "natural right" to buy and sell human beings as private property. Hour after hour, in a symbolic update of that belief, wealthy northerners in their big RVs passed us in the cotton fields on their way to sunny Florida. Why did the paper shufflers in New York and Massachusetts, who already had huge houses, get to have these RVs while the cotton pickers didn't even have a waterproof shack to live in? Even today each of their rolling homes costs ten times as much as the homes of my former cotton picker friends, and each trip to Florida emits as much CO2 (5 tons) as the poor produce in a year. The richest 10 percent of Americans emit 56.5 tons per capita and are literally drowning the cotton pickers of Pakistan by flooding a third of their land and destroying half of their cotton with the same innocent and mindless casteism directed against non-whites as yesterday.



2004 - rural Arkansas

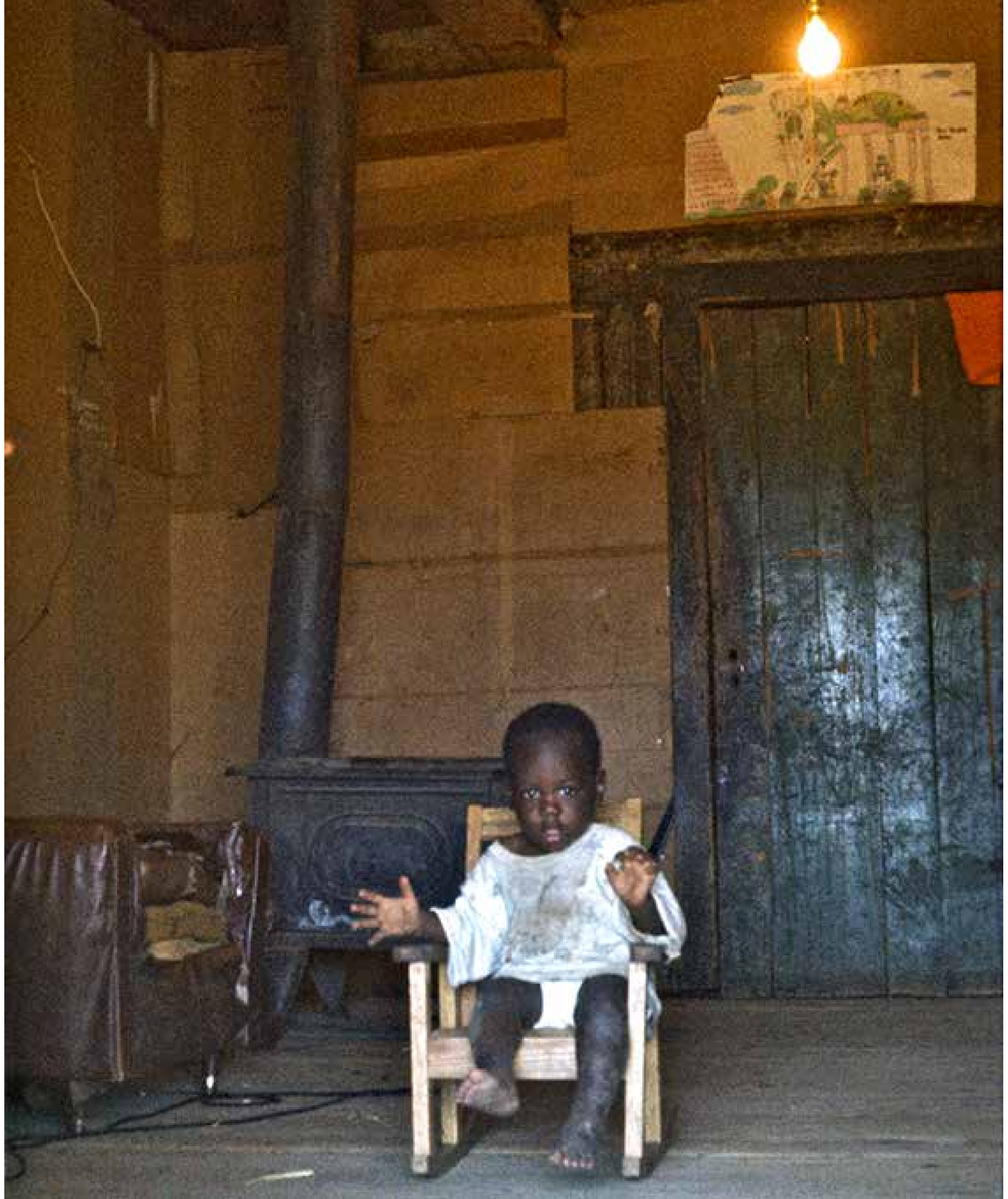
The song *Slave driver* by Taj Mahal illustrated





1995 - Notasulga, AL - below 1990 - Burke County, GA

1975 - Macon County AL - right 1973 - Tunica, LA



Hitchhiking Back Through 350 Years of Tobacco Bondage

"I grew up in the shadow of the tobacco fields, where my ancestors were enslaved and tortured. I saw the pain and the suffering in their eyes, and I heard their stories in their songs. I vowed to never let their voices be silenced, to never let their struggle be forgotten." - Nina Simone

1974 – rural Bethel, NC

In the tobacco fields as in the cotton fields, I saw that whites owned and directed everything, while blacks had to trail after them, both in the spring, when the tobacco was planted and unemployed women watched from their shacks and in August, when it was picked. "It's real nigger-work," I heard whites say. "They're already black so the tar doesn't stick to them as much." By law workers were guaranteed a minimum wage that was only a third of what I had received as an unskilled worker in Denmark. Worse, since it was seasonal work without much to do the rest of the year, it was indeed a meager income they scraped together. These people, who could've gained equality and freedom if they had received just a couple of cents per packet of cigarettes sold, worked with facial expressions that only a slave could express.

1974 – rural Bethel, NC - below 12 years later

1986 - Wendell, NC

1986 - Wendell, NC and below 1974 - rural Bethel, NC

1974 - Raleigh, NC - I interview Ben Chavis, listen to it below

Environmental racism and Black resistance in the tobacco industry

"The health consequences of working in tobacco fields are still felt today, with higher rates of respiratory illnesses and cancer in Black communities." - Dr. Camara Jones, co-founder of the National Black Nurses Association

Later in the summer, the tobacco was dried and sold at auction. There were few places where the master-slave relationship was so deeply imprinted in the minds of blacks as in the tobacco auctions. White buyers walked in front, giving quick discreet signals with pointed fingers and wagging heads, while the blacks hurried behind them packing the tobacco bundles. The whites drove straight into the auction hall in big flashy cars and ate plate-sized steaks for lunch, while the blacks had to eat their brown bag lunches outside.

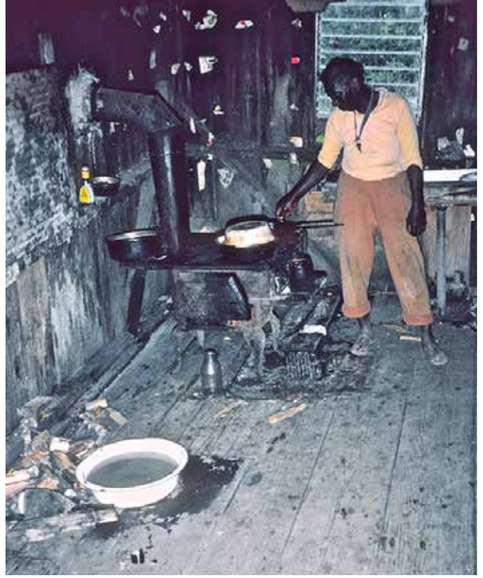
In the intervening years I saw blacks everywhere forced out completely and replaced by cheaper, often illegal Latin migrants. Blacks understandably felt exploited when, beginning in 2000, tobacco companies had to pay for their health insurance, which made them too "expensive." The tobacco industry also lost billions of dollars in government subsidies, so they started buying cheaper tobacco from poor countries that didn't provide health insurance like Zimbabwe. Over the years, the 22,000 tobacco farms were converted into huge industrial hog farms throughout eastern North Carolina. Why there? Because the poor blacks remaining were too powerless to protest the stench of urine spread throughout 3,404 lagoons across the former tobacco fields.

It was black civil rights activist Reverend Ben Chavis who first protested this new violation of black rights in the 1980s. I had interviewed him in 1973, after he'd been sentenced to 34 years in prison on false charges following civil rights battles in Wilmington. "This is environmental racism," Chavis shouted as the prison door slammed shut. His words started the fight against the continued environmental racism faced by people of color at the hands of a small handful of white hog industries with 9 million polluting and CO2-producing hogs. Our racism constantly finds new ways to manifest itself.

"Racial discrimination in the deliberated targeting of ethnic and minority communities for exposure to toxic and hazardous waste sites and facilities, coupled with the systematic exclusion of minorities in environmental policy making, enforcement, and remediation" - Ben Chavis

The song *Slave driver* by Taj Mahal - here illustrated with my tobacco photos

My shocking interview with Ben Chavis about how he got 34 years in prison



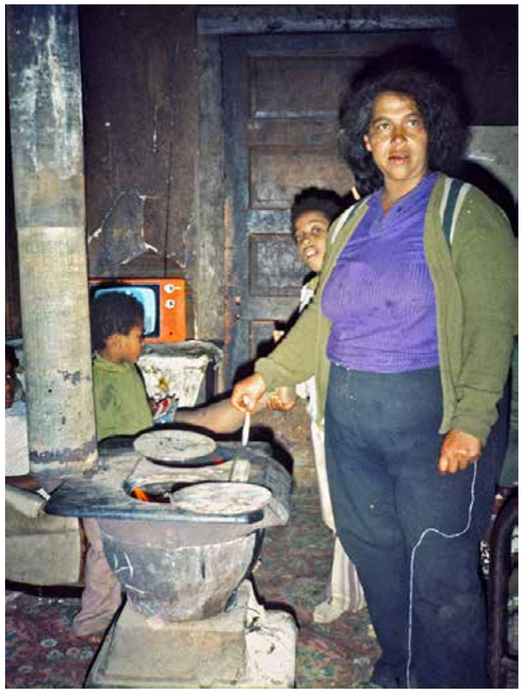
1975 - Bullock County, AL

1978 - Waynesboro, GA

1973 - Tunica, LA

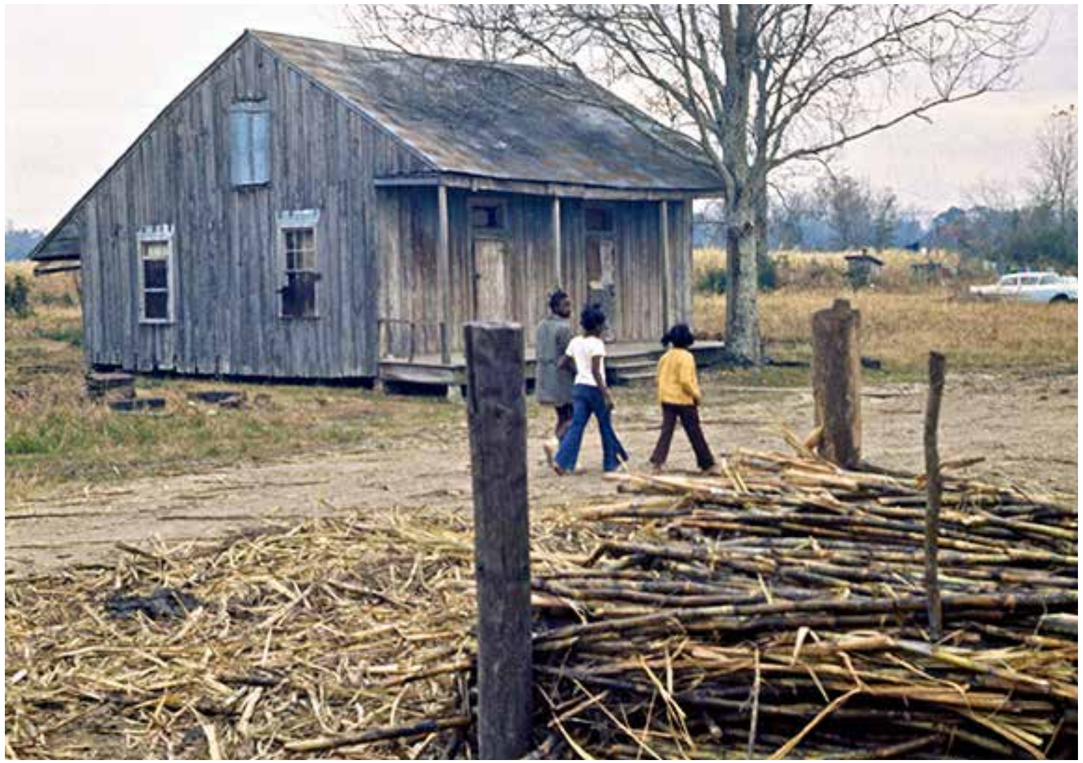
1975 – rural Meridian, MS

My Danish predecessor, Peter Sekaer, had photographed the same model wood-burning stove in the 1930s, which I still saw in the 1970s in the south, for example here in Mosley Whitley's house. It was called "Southern Jewel" by the manufacturer, Southern Stove Works.



1973 - Zebulon, NC

1975 -rural family, TN



1975 - rural Houma, LA

1975 - rural Houma, LA

From Slavery to Serfdom: The Enduring Struggles of Black Sugarcane Workers

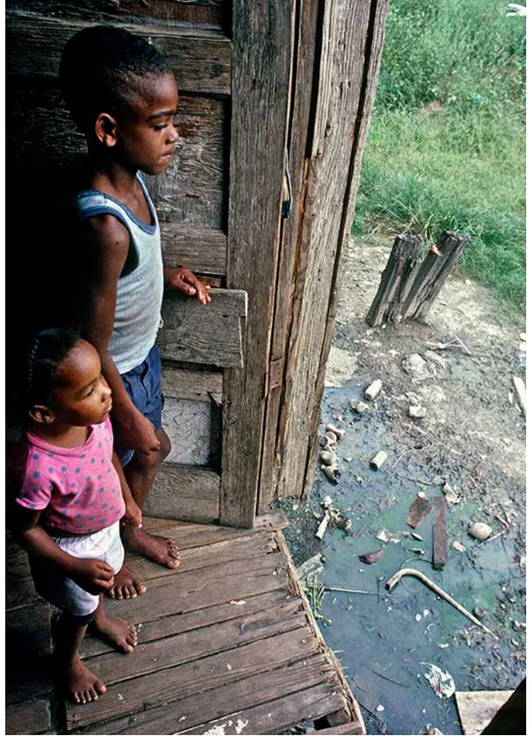
"The sugar plantation is the crucible where so much of the violence and exploitation in the South was forged. It is a place where Black bodies were broken and Black communities were fractured, and its legacy continues to shape the lives of Black people in the South today." - Jesmyn Ward, "Sing, Unburied, Sing"

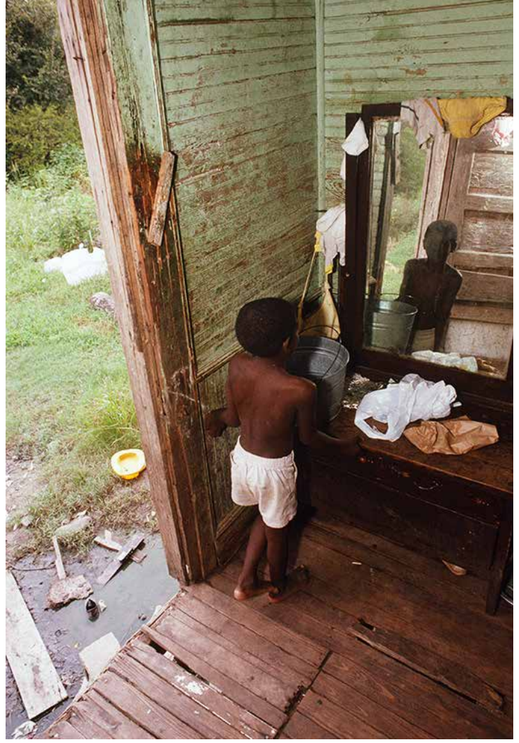
In winter I hitchhiked around the Deep South, and one year at Christmas I ended up on the sugar plantations of Louisiana. While I'd perceived slavery in North Carolina's tobacco fields primarily as a state of mind, here I was shocked to find purely feudal, serf-like conditions. Whites owned not only the plantations but also the houses in which the black workers lived. The shacks lay around his large plantation home in small clusters—exactly as in the time of slavery. Whites also owned everything else in these small villages, including the only store, known as "the company store." Prices were 30% higher here than in stores in the bigger towns, where the workers couldn't afford to go, and where, incidentally, they often couldn't read the street signs (many were illiterate).

Their average income was under $3,000 a year, which often had to support a family of 6–10 people. To survive, the workers therefore began to borrow from the landlord and soon fell into debt. Usually they didn't pay with cash in his stores but got more credit and were slowly pushed into economic bondage.
People who don't receive wages for their work can only be called slaves. Falling into such a vicious circle, they were in fact owned by the landlord: they couldn't leave his plantation until they paid off their debt. And that could only happen by a miracle.
I also saw a "miracle" here in the '90s, when black field hands, who cut sugar by hand, were replaced by expensive harvesting machines and Latino workers, forcing many of the blacks out of "their" homes (the miracle being they were now free to leave). Today, the white growers have become so rich from this "white gold" that they have also left the plantations and stopped using the term due to its association with slavery.

1975 - rural Houma, LA

1996 - rural Houma, LA





Both top: 1996 - rural Montgomery County, AL

Below 1996 - rural Burke County, GA

A Slave Remembers for Generations

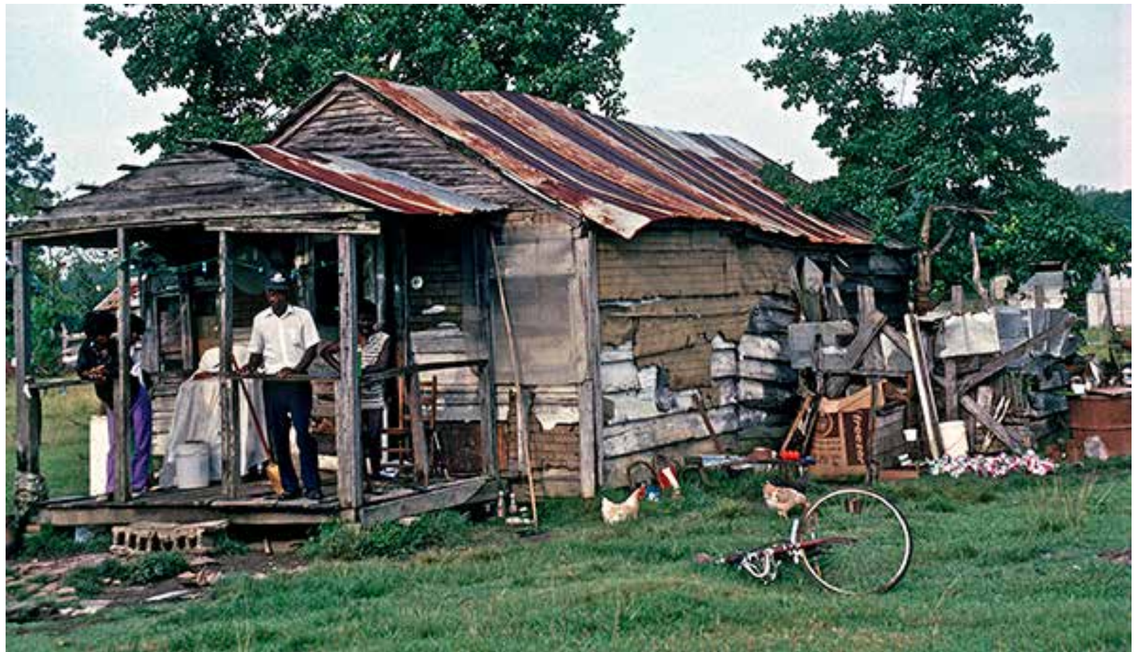
1975 - rural Houma, LA

"Don't lead with the fear of what might be, lead with the strength of who you are." - Natalie Baszile and Oprah Winfrey in "Queen Sugar"

When I was in New Orleans in 1973, the newspapers ran articles about this unseen feudalism just outside the city, about children on the sugar plantations who only got an orange once a year—for Christmas. A tear-jerking campaign was launched to send the children Christmas presents, and dental students arranged free dental buses when it was revealed that the families had never been able to afford to go to a dentist. I later found out that others had made efforts to organize these slave workers. A white Catholic priest tried to organize the blacks—meetings were held in secret because they were constantly shot at—but in vain. The blacks, who remembered an earlier insurrection in the 1930s in which many were killed, were afraid of losing everything. Although this probably had passed into history for the whites, I soon discovered everywhere in the black community that a slave remembers for generations.

After my original book came out, 60 Minutes did a story called "The Cane Curtain," which confirmed what I had written, calling the workers victims of a legacy of slavery. Hardly any of the blacks dared to talk to them, but CBS managed to get a group together in a church 50 miles away, where they talked with covered faces about their state of fear. One white grower talked shamelessly about the pennies his indentured servants owed him and how the USDA underpaid him in subsidies. Even today, sugar growers receive $1 billion a year in subsidies, meaning Americans pay twice as much for sugar as the rest of the world.

1996 - rural Montgomery County, AL



The Widow's Offering (Mark 12:41–44)

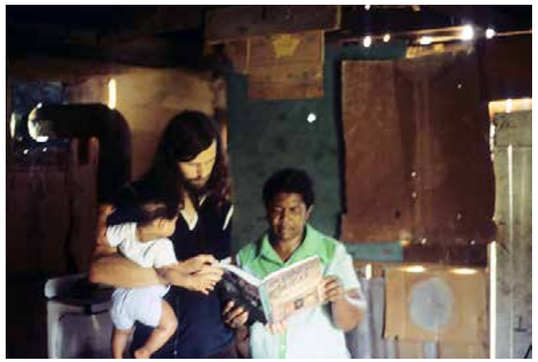
"The world craves connection. It craves the stories that bind us together, the stories that remind us that we are all human, all deserving of dignity and compassion." —Jesmyn Ward

Because of their fear of white reprisals, it was almost impossible to live with the plantation workers. When I finally managed to find a place and had gone to bed, the rumor about me had already swept through town like lightning. Suddenly the door was yanked open and George Davis, an angry neighbor, stuck the barrel of a gun in my stomach and chased me out into the winter night.

Later that night, Virginia Pate, a poor widow, took pity on me and let me to share a bed with five of her children in a shack far out in the swamps. It got cold in the morning when the stove went out, and since the children pulled the blanket to themselves, I froze the first night. But the next morning Virginia began repairing old quilts so I wouldn't freeze the next night. I'll never forget this widow, whom I've visited almost every year. She was willing to defy the whites even though she herself didn't dare stay under the same roof with me (she slept in her sister Eleanora's shack). I went hunting in the swamps, along with her son Morgan, for armadillos and other animals. We got drinking water from the roof gutter. George Davis was later murdered by Virginia's niece and nephew, Bertha and Bartram.

I had not in my wildest fantasy imagined that my friendship with Virginia Pate would last almost 40 years, until 2012, when I came to say goodbye to her shortly before her death. Over the years I had taken countless friends with me to visit her, including a leader from the Ku Klux Klan.

Left Virginia Pate. Top the children in 1973 - Tunica, LA



When Danish film crews came to make movies of her, she took them around to all the places I had stayed with her and family. For through her I also became a member of her larger family of 7 sisters and 4 brothers. As with many other families in this book I made elaborate family trees to keep track of her increasing number of children, 17 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Her children Morgan, Doretha and Oliver often came on stage with me to answer questions from my audience, "how it was for them to have shared bed with a strange looking white man."

Giving Virginia Pate my book in 1978

Virginia trying to strangulate the Ku Klux Klan leader Jeff Berry in 2005

Virginia Pate tells Danish Tv-crew about how I first ended up staying with her

40 Years of Friendship Leads to Freedom After 40 Years

"Companies don't have souls, only people do. And it's up to us, the individuals, to make sure our souls are intact." —Anita Roddick

Her sister Beryl or "Black" amused all my friends. Although deeply religious, as a prison guard in the local Angola prison she sat in the tower 12 hours every night. "Would you shoot at your two nephews if they tried to flee?" "Of course, I will shoot anyone getting just close to the fence." For it was her sister, Elnora's two twins, Bertha and Bertram, who killed George Davis – who had the first night almost killed me with his shotgun in Virginia's house. I didn't meet Bertha shown here until 1994 when she was released, but with his 75-year sentence Bertram will never get out of Angola.

Last visit to Virginia in hospital in 2012

Bertha in 1994 after her release writing to her twin brother in Angola

Anita Roddick in 1994 with Virginia's niece, Virginia Honore, married to a prison guard

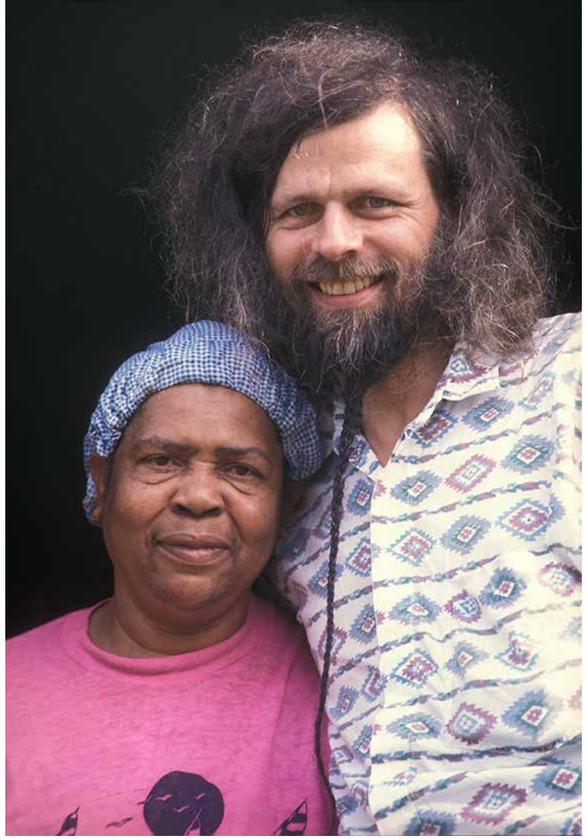
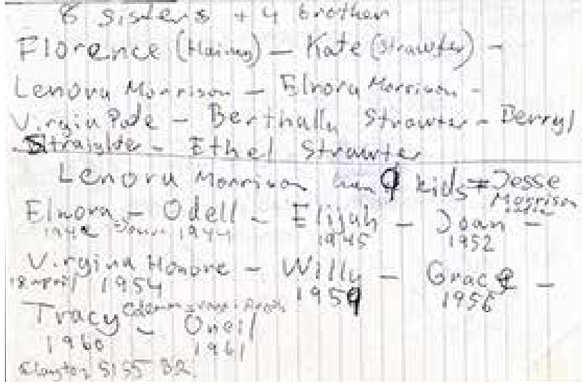


Photo of Virginia Pate and me taken by Anita Roddick in 1994



Before the PC genealogy programs came it was hard to keep up with the families in my book

From the struggle to free the Angola 3

And this brings me to my point of why it is so important to bring people together. I had met them all on April 13th, 1973, when I was trying to get into the Angola prison because blacks in New Orleans had told me that once you entered there, you never got out again. I had started photographing for the Black Panthers and the year before three activist Panthers from New Orleans had been falsely accused of stabbing a white guard. Framed entirely for their Panther activism they were thrown into solitary confinement for life.

In 1994 I invited Anita Roddick with me. She had overnight become a billionaire when she took her cosmetic company, The Body Shop, on the stock market and wanted my help to invest in the black community. So, when I and Bertha told her about "The Angola Three," she started a worldwide campaign for their release. She managed to get into the prison to visit the three "political prisoners," one of whom, according to Woodfox, had survived by learning (via the Black Panthers) to read about the history of black oppression, "When I began to understand who I was, I considered myself free."

Now Anita had the power to make a change for oppressed people—and used it to get the three Panthers released after 30–42 years in solitary confinement—the longest in American history. That's one of the things that came out of my friendship with Virginia Pate, and why I love this photo Anita took of us together. The following year, Anita invited me to her castle in Scotland, next to Queen Elizabeth's Balmoral. White privilege has many faces.

Harvest of shame: The White gold turns into Black snow

"The sugar plantations are the most horrible places in the world. They are worse than hell. They are the places where human beings are treated worse than animals." — Harry Belafonte

In my vagabond years, 1970–76, Florida's Attorney General charged the owners of sugar plantations with slavery. A few were imprisoned for actually chaining the workers, but under President Reagan they stopped prosecuting such slave owners. After the day's tiring work, blacks were driven like cattle to a slave camp surrounded by barbed wire and "No Trespassing" signs. Inside the camps, where I saw them living up to 100 in each room, only one dared to talk to me, hidden in a toilet, as they were immediately fired for talking to whites.

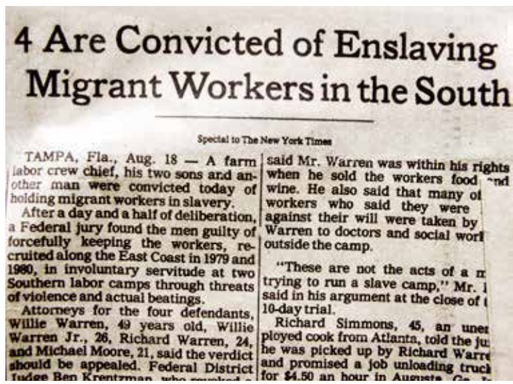
These slave camps are owned by Domino Sugar, but the real slave owner is the government, which pays half the operating costs in subsidies. After a spate of lawsuits in recent years against Domino Sugar for "modern slavery," Florida passed the Right to Farm Act to stop such nuisances (and trespassers like me on their "private property"), as well as the lawsuits for pollution from burning the cane fields. This causes the "black snow" that today darkens the skies over the angry unemployed blacks I saw on my last trip to Belle Glades, after modern mechanization had partially freed them from this slavery.

1996 - Belle Glade, FL

1996 - Benson, NC

1974 - Palm Beach County, FL

1974 - Immokalee, FL



4 Are Convicted of Enslaving Migrant Workers in the South

Special to The New York Times

TAMPA, Fla., Aug. 18 — A farm labor crew chief, his two sons and another man were convicted today of holding migrant workers in slavery.

After a day and a half of deliberation, a Federal jury found the men guilty of forcefully keeping the workers, recruited along the East Coast in 1979 and 1980, in involuntary servitude at two Southern labor camps through threats of violence and actual beatings.

Attorneys for the four defendants, Willie Warren, 49 years old, Willie Warren Jr., 26, Richard Warren, 24, and Michael Moore, 21, said the verdict should be appealed. Federal District

said Mr. Warren was within his rights when he sold the workers food and wine. He also said that many of workers who said they were against their will were taken by Warren to doctors and social work outside the camp.

"These are not the acts of a m trying to run a slave camp," Mr. said in his argument at the close of 10-day trial.

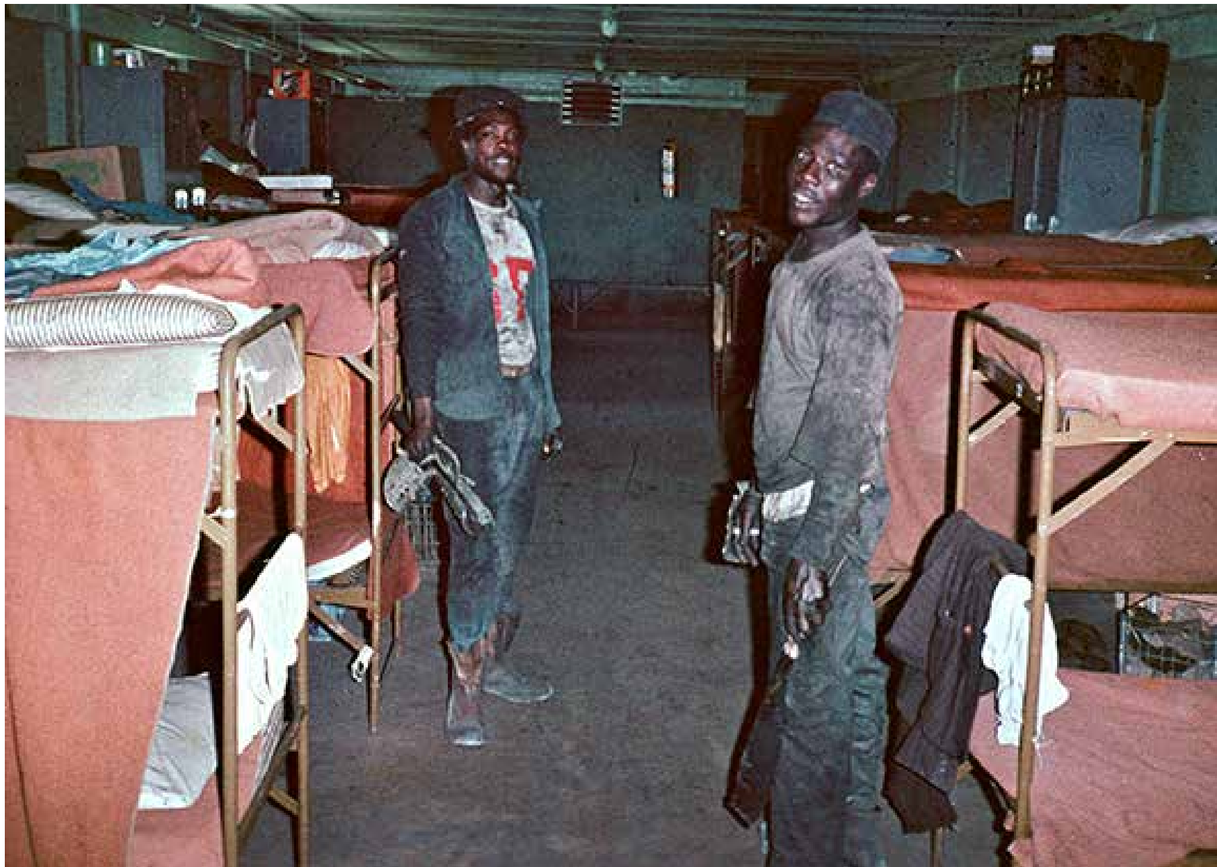
Richard Simmons, 45, an unem ployed cook from Atlanta, told the ju he was picked up by Richard Warre and promised a job unloading truck for $4.50 an hour in Augusta, Ga.

1983 - New York Times

1974 - Belle Glade, FL

1974 - Belle Glade, FL

1974 - Belle Glade, FL



“The Underground Railroad”: The Escape from Modern Slavery

“Stolen bodies working stolen land. It was an engine that did not stop, its hungry boiler fed with blood.” - Colson Whitehead in ”The Underground Railroad”

Today, I find more and more of these slave camps and often shock my university students when I take them to visit them. In North Carolina, I found bars where “slave-catchers” kidnap drunk men to take to their camps. These camps separate and destroy the black family, as slavery has always done. Wives and children are not allowed in the camps. Several men I talked to had not seen their families for up to eight months. A bloodstained black hitchhiker I picked up after a lecture late one night had been so beaten up by the guards during his escape attempt that I had to treat his wounds. He told of another whose legs were crushed by the guards after an escape attempt and who now had to walk on crutches. “Welcome back to the free world,” I said. But he shook his head. He was on his way up to North Carolina’s camps, and voting with his feet was not a real choice for someone imprisoned by indifferent American voters in this gulag.

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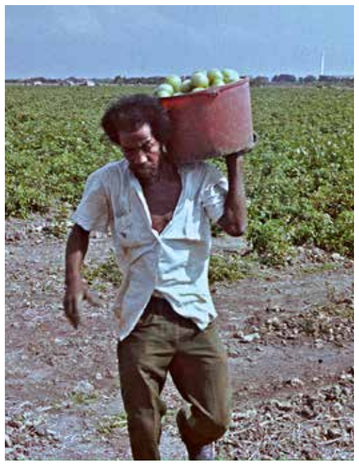
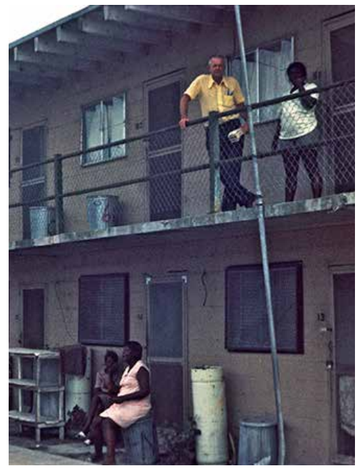


Both from 1974 - Hwy 29, FL

1996 - Immokalee, FL

1992 - USA Today



1974 - Belle Glade, Florida, with landlord

2009 - Belle Glade, FL

2009 - Belle Glade, FL

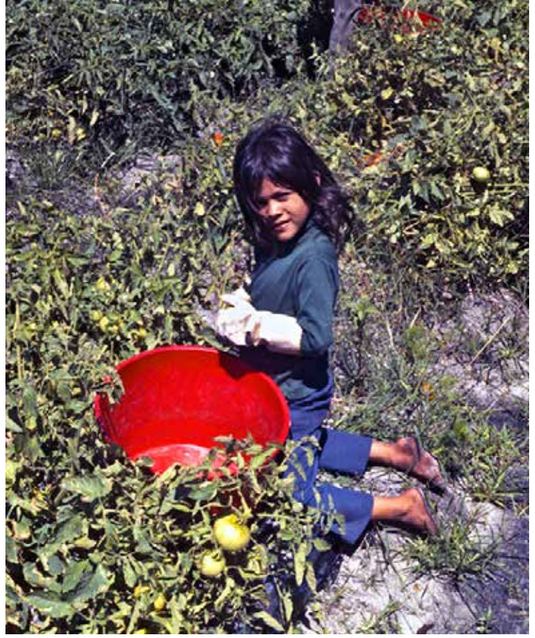
The grapes of wrath: Child labor is booming again in Trump's America

"Poverty whispers in the ears of mothers and children that they are somehow less than others..." - Marian Wright Edelman, Children Left Behind

"The fields were a cruel teacher, and the children learned their lessons early: the sting of sun, the ache of muscles, the emptiness of hunger." - Maya Angelou

Elsewhere, I saw migrant camps where entire families could live together but were so dependent on each other's earnings that they couldn't afford to let their children leave work to go to school. But what I saw then is far worse today, when even more of America's fruit is picked by children between the ages of 12 and 16. For as child-labor violations grew in the '80s, Reagan began loosening the laws, which gained strength under the Tea Party Republicans around 2000. And in today's Trump mindset, state after state is getting rid of child protection laws altogether. It's worth remembering when Americans are bombarded with cheap fruit products that these are not only the result of wages only half as high as in Scandinavia. They are also the "grapes of wrath" of farm workers, whom the voters have chosen not to provide with any social safety net like ours. They have no unemployment benefits, no free medical care or education, rent subsidies, child supplement, nurseries, or kindergartens. While Europe spends $14,000 a year on childcare compared to $500 in the US, Biden's attempt to raise this in the IRA was rejected by Republicans. When they get sick, they starve and are evicted like Sonny, on the right, in 2009 in Belle Glade. The cheap fruit we enjoy makes us guilty of de facto slavery. Nearly three-quarters of the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported the sudden onset of serious symptoms—including nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, headaches, dizziness, skin rashes, difficulty breathing, and irritation of the eyes and mouth—while working in the tobacco fields and in barns where dried tobacco leaves and tobacco dust are present. Many of these symptoms are consistent with acute nicotine poisoning.

1974 - rural Bethel, NC



1974 - Hwy 29, FL

1974 - Allendale County, SC - Below 1974 - Greenville, NC

Below 1974 - Greenville, NC

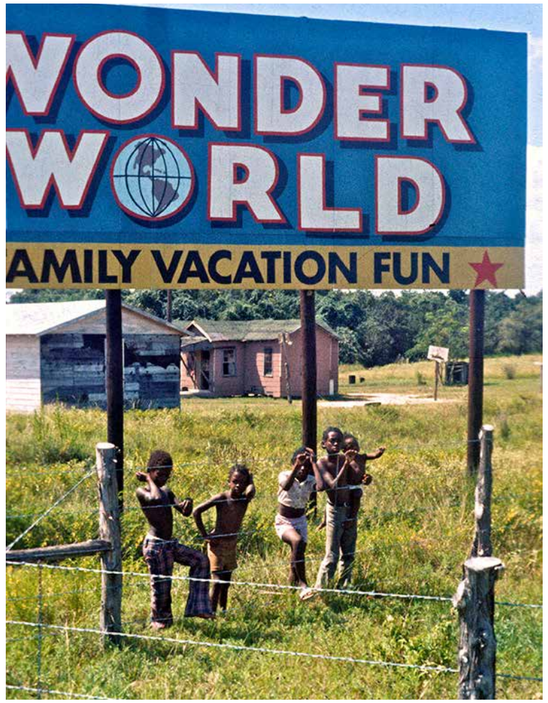
Coca-Cola's slave camps:

From exploitation to resistance

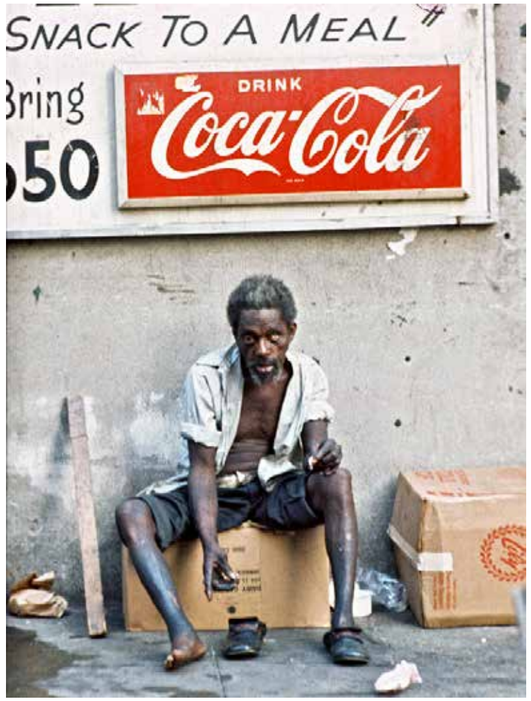
""The South is not a monolithic entity. There are black people who stand up for their rights, and there are white people who stand up for their rights. Our struggle is not against white people, but against oppression." - Alice Walker

One day I saw the Coca-Cola name on the trucks that drive orange juice from the camps to the northern states and found out that Coca-Cola, under the name Minute Maid, owns quite a few of these slave camps.

1974 - Apopka, FL



1974 - rural Texas



1975 - NYC

Cesar Chavez and UFW in 1975 - Modesto, CA

"We cannot expect the oppressor to give us freedom. We must take it." - Cesar Chavez

Coca-Cola's slave camps aren't the worst in Florida although many children suffer from deficiency diseases and anemia, which makes them exhausted and emaciated. When my book first came out, Coca-Cola sent me a letter, admitting how terrible the conditions were, but also stating they'd now embarked on reforms and offered to fly me down there so that I could testify that they'd improved conditions. If anything had changed when I returned, it was a result of Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers' contract with Coca Cola—enforced by his tireless marches, which I too had joined.

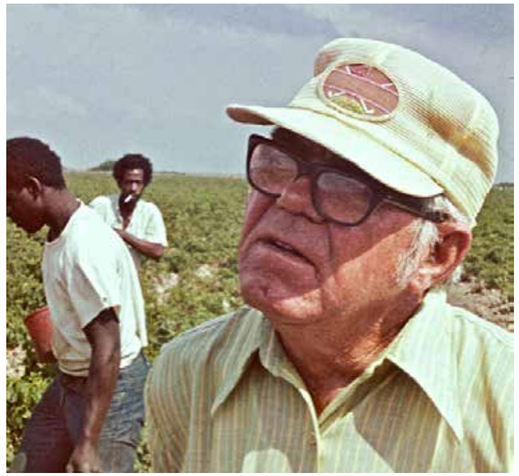
Cesar Chavez in 1975 - Modesto, CA

Fields of Deception - The Weight of White Lies

"I can't trust a man who can't see my tears." - Solange Knowles in "Where Do We Go"

In South Florida, I came to live with a white tomato grower who told me he earned nearly a million dollars a year on migrant workers. I got kicked out when he discovered my photographs of "niggers":
- Now what is your main purpose? It isn't just touring. I wasn't born yesterday. I tell you the truth, you're from that civil rights stuff up North.
- No I'm just studying agriculture for a book
- Well, if you stay with these slummy people, that's the kind of slummy book you gonna have, ain't that right? It depends on what kind of people you talk to. You say you talk to both whites and colored.
- I trust everybody.
- You will find colored people treated better here than anywhere in the United States. They are happy.

I always tried to respect the honesty of these southern racists, so when my tape recorder later revealed that I, in the heat of the argument, had told him a (white) lie, I felt a bit depressed. I had at that time no idea that my photos would one day end up in a book.



1974 - Hwy 29, FL - landlord in the live interview

1974 - Hwy 29, FL

Above interview with the land owner

1994 - rural Bullock County, AL

"We are living in a dying land." - Jesmyn Ward in Sing, Unburied, Sing

Later I got to live with some of his field workers, who were blacks and fugitive Mexicans. Their situation is depressing, to put it mildly. Many are too destroyed to talk about their situation, but this woman, who was one of the few poor whites in the fields, told me, in her little rented shack, about the conditions:

-Have you ever been on welfare or food stamps? – If I could get it I would, because I really need it. -How much does your husband make a week usually? – Not much, thirty-five or forty dollars a week, maybe. That don't hardly pay the rent and for something to eat.
-And you work seven days a week?
- Seven days a week for 40 dollars, yes!
-Was there times where you had nothing to eat?
- There's been times where I had nothing, not even a cigarette. I've been down where I just had sugar, water and bread for three weeks. The people who ain't got it, they really suffer.
- But who would you blame for it all?
- The government. It is trying to starve us out.
-You don't blame any of the people around here?
- No, I don't blame my people. I blame my government.
- I'm glad you don't blame the blacks or the Mexicans for it. A lot of people do, you know.
- No, this comes from the government itself. That's the reason there has been all the rioting and all this stuff... I've had my clothes and everything burned out three times.

1974 - Immokalee, FL - woman in the live interview

My interview with the poor white woman

Immokalee: Twilight of our unseen and forgotten

1974 - Immokalee, FL

"We are never free from the feeling that something will come and take everything away." - Jesmyn Ward

"The body has memory. The physical carriage hauls more than its weight." - Claudia Rankine

It was a pleasant surprise to find a poor white who didn't indirectly blame the blacks for her own misfortune since it's common among poor whites to turn them into scapegoats. In her town, Immokalee, several white slave-camp owners have since been jailed by the Florida Attorney General. But conditions have even worsened since my first visit in 1974, when armed guards fired at all intruders, even NBC journalists who failed to film anything. Even violence- prone rednecks warned me not to go there and didn't dare drive me even in daylight. I ended up living there for a week with some poor migrant workers, but to this day I'm amazed I escaped with my life. Somehow, I managed to make friends with one of the black guards, who gave me a little food and followed me at a distance in the streets to "protect" me. Both he and the police chief told me that 25 bodies had been found in the streets in the last half year in this town of only 3,000 inhabitants. Every single night I could hear gunshots.

1974 - Hwy 29, FL

1974 - Immokalee, FL

1974 - Immokalee, FL

1974 - Immokalee, FL

1974 - Immokalee, FL

I saw more blood there than anywhere else in America but only dared to photograph a few things. This Mexican was stabbed while I was sitting next to him. Every morning there was a row of shabby individuals along the road who'd been knocked down and robbed of everything the night before and were now trying to hitchhike out of town. But many never got out of this slave camp. What came to interest me most was not the dead bodies but the live ones—people in whom everything was extinct. These exhausted wretches, who'd managed to survive by working hard seven days a week, had slowly succumbed and were now just lying around waiting to die. At night they slept in the streets. One of them is squeezed in between the Pepsi and the Coca-Cola machines. In 2008 the Coalition of Immokalee Worker's Anti-Slavery Campaign won its lawsuit against what the US Attorney General called "outright slavery" and several white slave-camp owners were jailed in the 2000s thanks to the anti-slavery campaign that helped free 1,200 workers held against their will by armed guards.

Driving a hitchhiker home to Immokalee in 1996, my fellow traveler, Eli Saeter, a Norwegian, wrote in her book: "Outside the house where we are now, the hiker found two people killed. One had his head shot away. The other was stabbed. I'm scared. I dare not sleep. Jacob is exhausted, has driven far too far. He sleeps like a rock."
Yes, over the years I got used to the violence.

1974 - Immokalee, FL

Escape to sanctuary and sovereignty

"In the 17th century our ancestors fought against slavery and escaped into the northern bushlands of Spanish Florida. There we joined with our Indian brothers and sisters who had also escaped from the oppression of the European slavers. Together, for many years, we resisted their attempts to recapture us." - Black Seminoles – Proven Sustainable

During my first visit, I soon received so many death threats because of my photography that, like previous runaway black slaves, I found sanctuary with the Native Americans outside the city. Here I came to live with this woman from the Seminole tribe. I found it romantic to live in a palm-leaf hut, but the romance wasn't to last only a couple of days. One night I was awoken by shouts ordering me out of the hut. I felt my last hour had come, but had no choice other than to step out into the headlights of a pickup truck from which men with guns shouted to me in Mexican accents: "You be out of town before sunrise. If not, you will never see another sunrise!"

I knew they were deadly serious, and the woman didn't dare to harbor me any longer, so I slipped out of town like a shadow, grateful that the Seminoles had given me shelter as they once had done for blacks. That I had indeed lived outside the law I saw years later when I returned and found that the Seminoles had set up the first Native American casino, laying the groundwork for a multibillion-dollar industry to replace alligator wrestling and their previous types of gambling. Their one-armed bandits take from white players and give each member of the tribe $130,000 a year—more than three times the average U.S. income and eight times as much as the black and Latino tomato pickers make slaving away around their mansions. By the time such Seminole children turn 18, they are already multimillionaires—benefactors of the only government-sanctioned reparations I know of in America.
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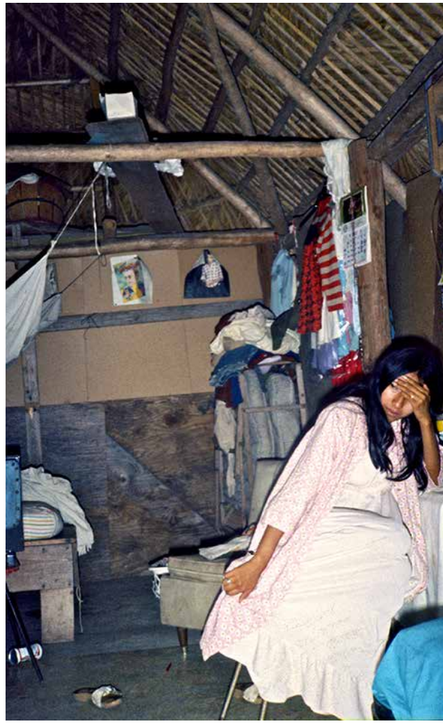
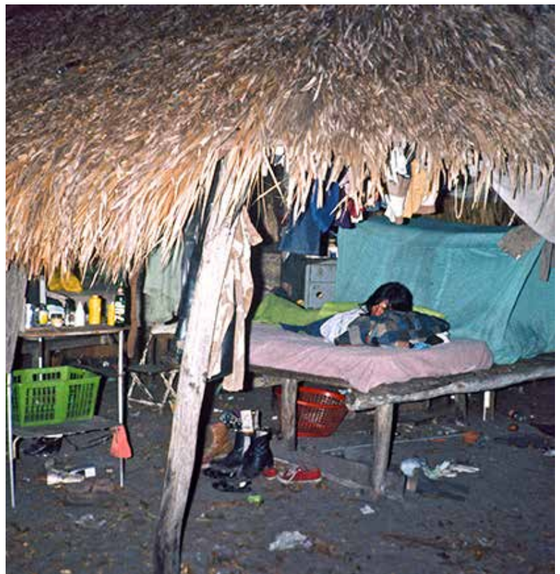


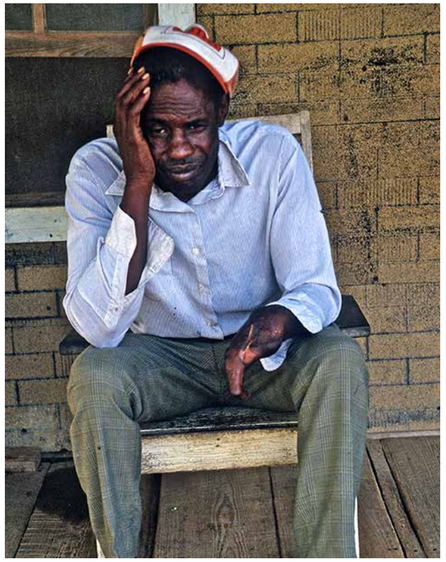
All from 1974 - Immokalee Reservation, FL



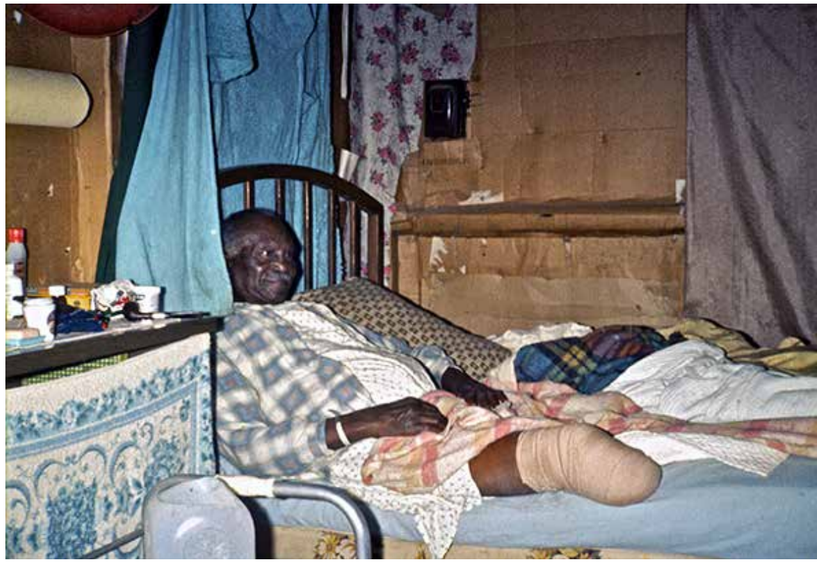
From Chains to Clocks: Echoes of the Whip

"Shall the labor unions use their influence to deprive the black man of his opportunity to labor [or] unite with those who want to give every man, regardless of color, race or creed, what Colonel Roosevelt calls the 'square deal' in the matters of labor?"
- Booker T. Washington

In my journey, I sought answers as to why we constantly see an enemy image in our fellow human beings and thus enable violence against them. I wondered about the working conditions that continue to blunt us in body and mind.
Rough work is still performed by blacks while whites direct it. Many blacks were killed in these sawmills and even more feet and fingers have been cut off—as on this worker. In Central America I saw how the US provides military support for the bloody repression of trade unions, yet I was shocked to find almost no trade unions in the Southern States that could protect such workers. These workers received no compensation when the saw cut their fingers off, and they had to be back at work two days later, for as one was told, "there are a lot of hungry niggers outside waiting to get work."
Southern states still have "right to work" laws that exempt workers from paying into labor unions. The laws were originally passed by white supremacists to destroy unions by creating fear that whites would be "forced into organizations with black African 'monkeys' whom they will have to call 'brother' or lose their jobs".
Martin Luther King warned against being fooled by such "right to work" laws, which "rob us of our civil and labor rights and the freedom to bargain collectively to improve wages and working conditions for all."
Even today Jeff Bezos makes his billions by regularly firing Amazon union members, who have few alternative benefits and little unemployment compensation in the South.



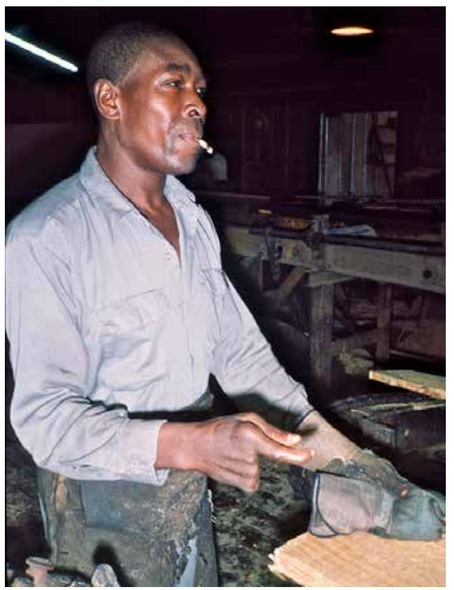
1996 - rural Bullock County, AL



1973 - Tunica, LA

1975 - Washington, GA

1975 - Washington, GA



1975 - Washington, GA

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."
by William Faulkner paraphrased by Barack Obama in "A More Perfect Union"

In a society that makes such violent inroads against other human beings and where European concepts of employee participation are light years away, workers perceive the time clock as the slave master's new whip—a symbol of our perennial oppression. When, five years later, I returned to see migrant worker Sam Kator (photo on page 83) to give him my book, I found he'd been beaten to death by police in a prison cell. Traveling in the world of black Americans inevitably becomes a journey into the soul and into the history of every person you meet. You begin to understand the traits and tendencies we've impressed on the collective consciousness of black people through slavery and how since then we've not only perpetuated and revived both their distress patterns and our own, but also intensified them.

1996 - Immokalee, FL

More photos of workers at the time clock

1975 - rural Bullock County, AL

"I am not a slave. I am a man. I have a history, a culture, a mind, a soul. I am not a thing to be used, discarded and forgotten."
Octavia Butler, Kindred

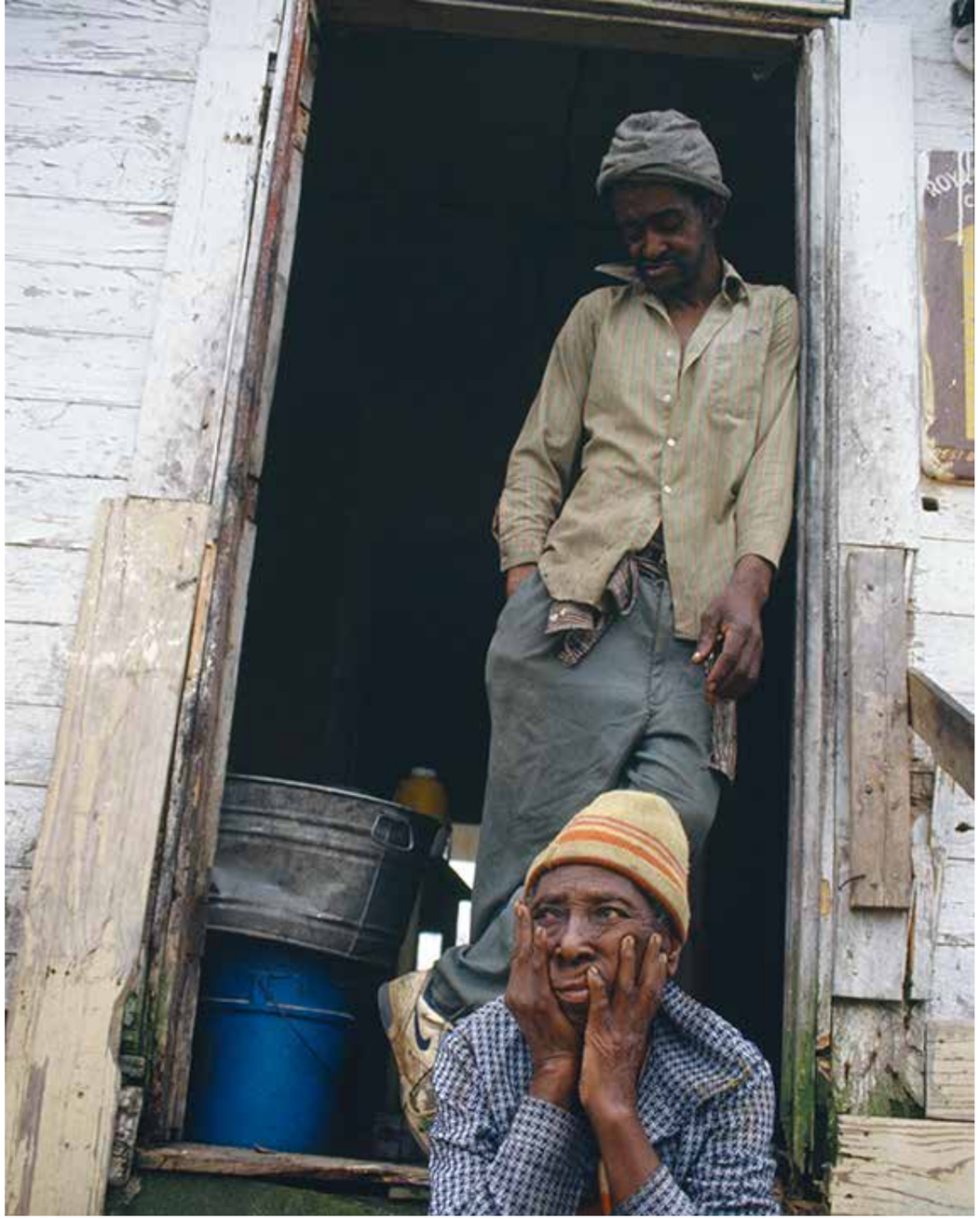
"The past is all that makes the present coherent, and further, the past will remain horrible for exactly as long as we refuse to assess it honestly."
- James Baldwin

Poor slave,
take the shackles off your body,
poor slave,
put the shackles on your mind.

Please listen to me carefully
and if I'm wrong then correct me.
But if I'm right my song do praise,
now let's see if we agree:
The definition of a slave
means one not free entirely
so a slave is still a slave
if he can't think independently."

1974 - Washington, NC

1994 - rural Bullock County, AL



1996 - rural Bullock County, AL

1974 - Immokalee, FL

1996 - rural Bullock County, AL

1974 - Greenville, NC

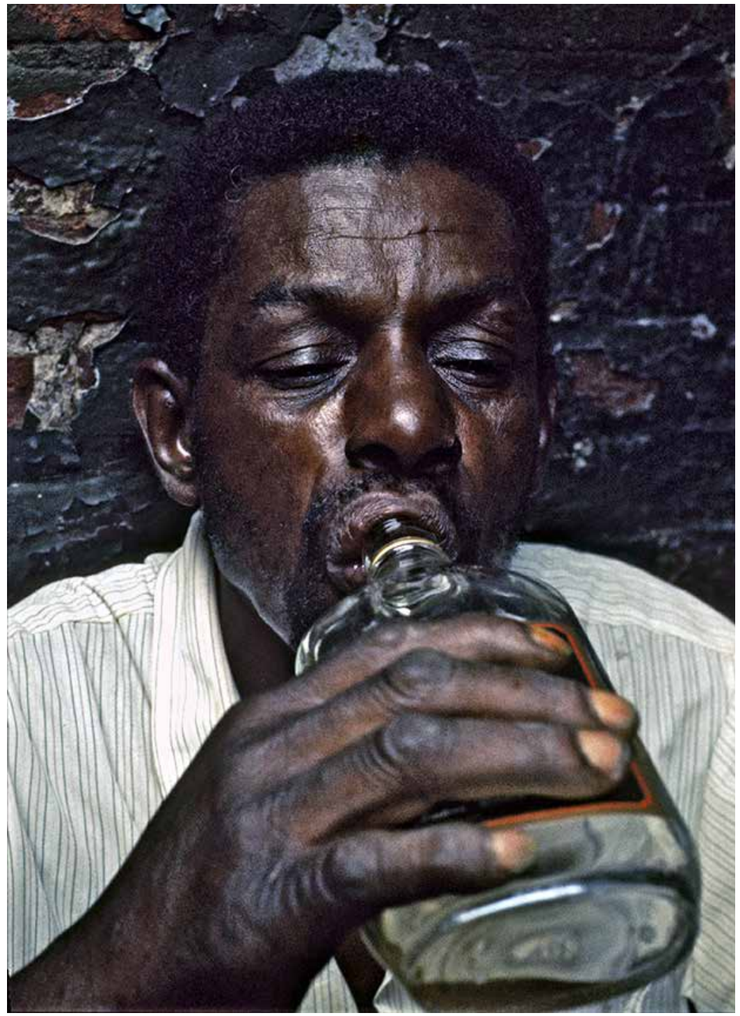
A people without the knowledge of their past history is like a tree without roots."
- Marcus Garvey, leader of the Pan-Africanist movement

A tree is still a tree
though it sheds its leaves
when winter comes.
But it blooms again in spring
for it did not lose its roots at all.
But a slave remains a slave
without the knowledge of his roots
until he's taught the past
not just some, but all the truth.

Poor slave, take the shackles off your body,
poor slave, put the shackles on your mind.

1975 - Dallas, TX

1974 - rural Alachua, FL



1973 - Baltimore

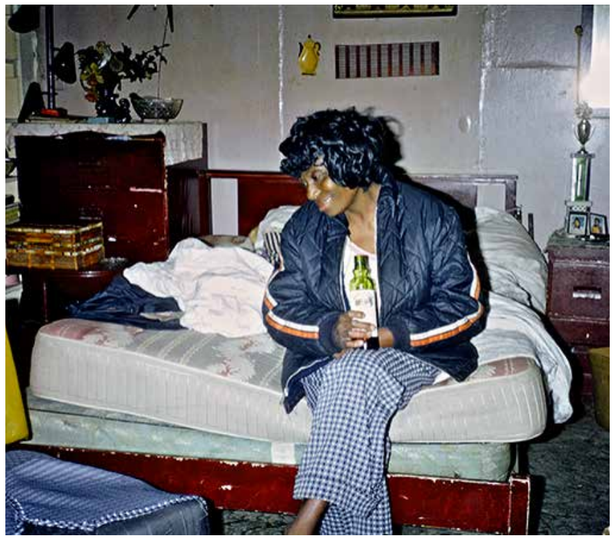
1996 - Belle Glade, FL

"I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time being ashamed." — Ralph Ellison, author of Invisible Man

"The more you know of your history, the more liberated you are." - Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

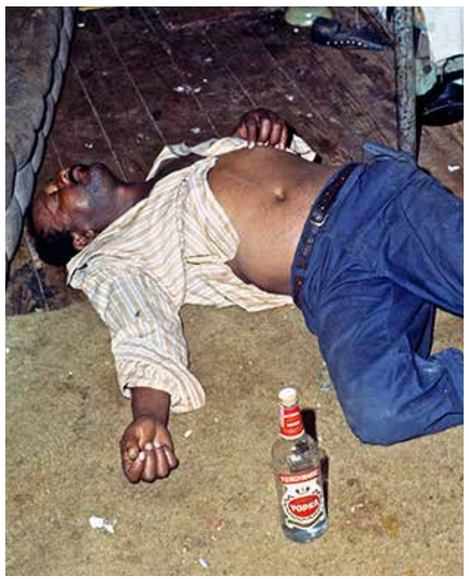
There was a brother the other day
telling me he's feeling high
but I just sadly had to sigh
for drugs and booze ain'tglory,
and if I had the chance to get high
I would tell the truth and not a lie,
for the highest high a man can get
is from wisdom, knowledge and
understanding.
Poor slave,
ease the pressure off your body,
poor slave,
put it on your mind...

Jimmy Cliffs powerfull song
Poor Slave illustrated



1974 - Washington, NC

1994 - rural Bullock County, AL



1978 - Zebulon, NC

2008 - Bullock County, AL

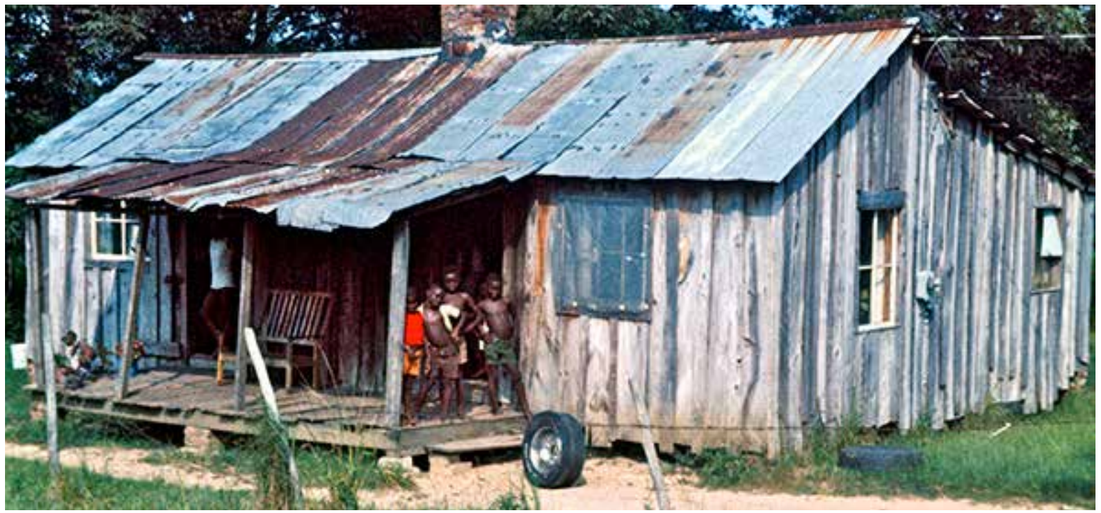
How our caste privilege makes us blind to the suffering around us

"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."
—Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man

When I lived with the underclass, I understood how physical shackles also became mental shackles. The shacks in which we've confined our slain brother Cain since the time of slavery were utterly inhuman and did not admit a feeling of freedom or the opportunity to unfold intellectually and creatively. One hundred years ago, whites lived next door to blacks. To see the outcasts consigned to inferior living conditions is incomprehensible and hurtful to the innocent white child.

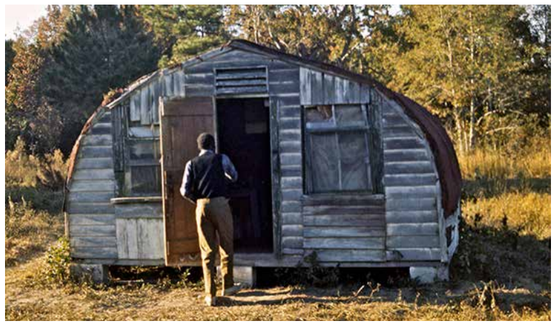
Growing up, we're slowly manipulated into developing hostile images—with the result that the natural joy of being with blacks in the US or immigrants in Europe is violently suppressed. When the vicious circle of oppression is thus fulfilled, it becomes natural for whites to rationalize away how these outcasts live right next to their own luxury homes in miserable shacks, often smaller than this original slave cabin. Or as students in the South often said after my lectures, "Before I saw your show, it never occurred to me that real people lived in those shacks!"

Yet, the gloomy abyss in our minds, reflected by these slum conditions, was far worse than in my photographs. The pictures don't show how the wind whistled through the cracks, making it impossible to keep warm in winter, or the sagging rotten floors with splits so wide that snakes and vermin crawled right into the living room. The powerlessness I felt trying to photograph these stifling sensations mirrored the powerlessness they imposed on the trapped victims. Even if I could have afforded a wide-angle lens to record the narrowness, the images couldn't show the absence of running water, toilets, showers, and electricity. I saw thousands of Americans grow up in the glow of the kerosene lamp. "



1975 - rural Bullock County, AL

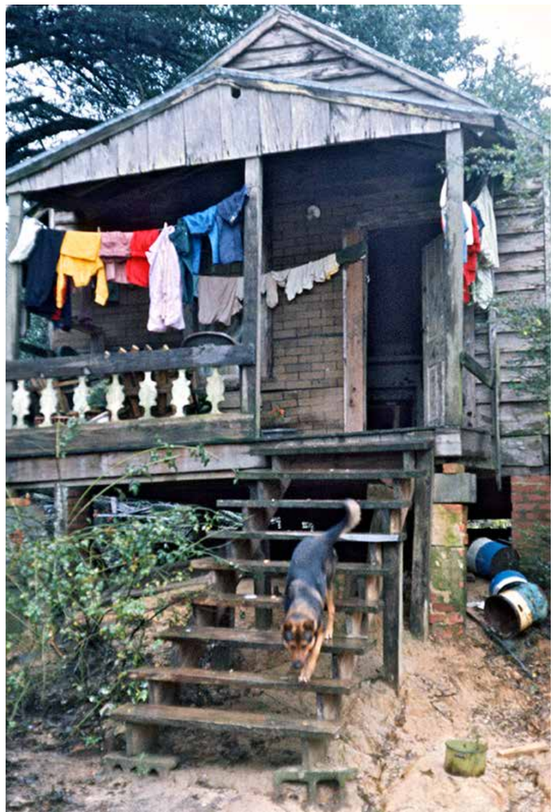
Below left 1973 - rural MS - right 1974 - rural Savannah SC

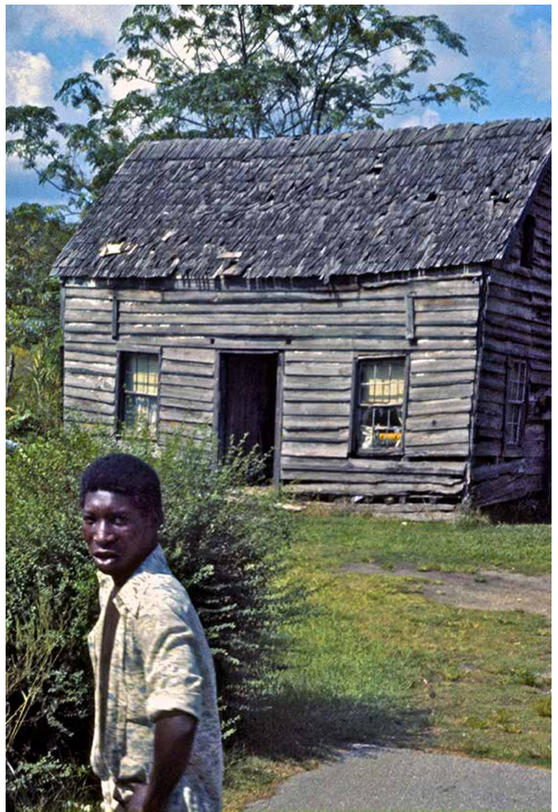


1974 - rural Savannah SC

1973 - near Bamberg, SC

Left 1974 - original slave cabin on plantation, SC
- 1978 Bullock County, AL





Billboard Dreams in Slums

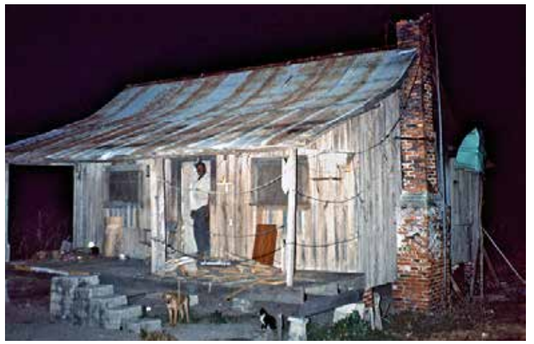
"But there were dreams beneath those corrugated roofs, hopes woven into the cracks of those weathered boards. We knew this even in our youngest moments." —Jacqueline Woodson, Brown Girl Dreaming

In the same way I didn't feel capable of portraying the strange psychic feeling of suddenly being transferred to a condition we in Denmark haven't known for the last hundred years (although it was delightful, after all the stifling noise characterizing American homes, to suddenly stand in the silence of no TV or radio). Liberal whites, who don't fear their lights will be turned off, sometimes argue during my lectures that blacks should be happy for the same reason. With such romanticism we reveal a terrifying insensitivity toward the psychology of involuntary poverty.
And even if you are, perhaps, free from the invasion of the commercials of an affluent society inside your slum dwelling, you nevertheless have your prospect destroyed by the aggressive billboards right outside.

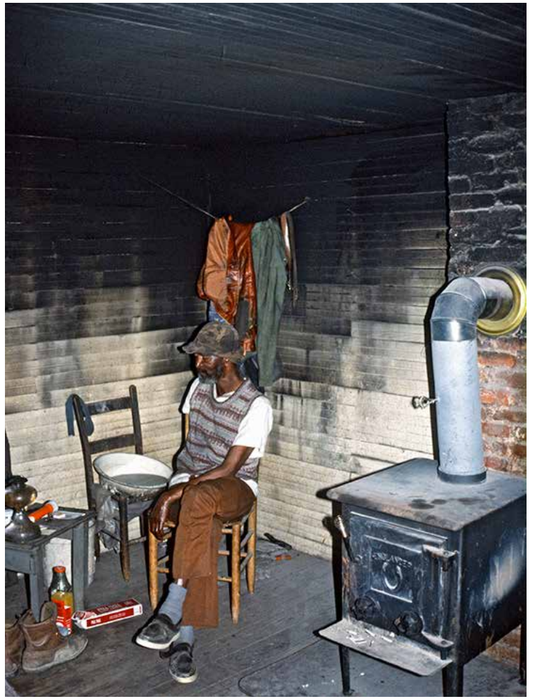
1974 - Jacksonville, FL

1990 - Burke County, GA

1975 - Philadelphia, MS



1974 - rural La Crosse, FL



1996 - rural Capron, VA

Below 1975 - rural Burke County, GA

Shacks today

"There are years that ask questions and years that answer." - Zora Neale Hurston, "Their Eyes Were Watching God"

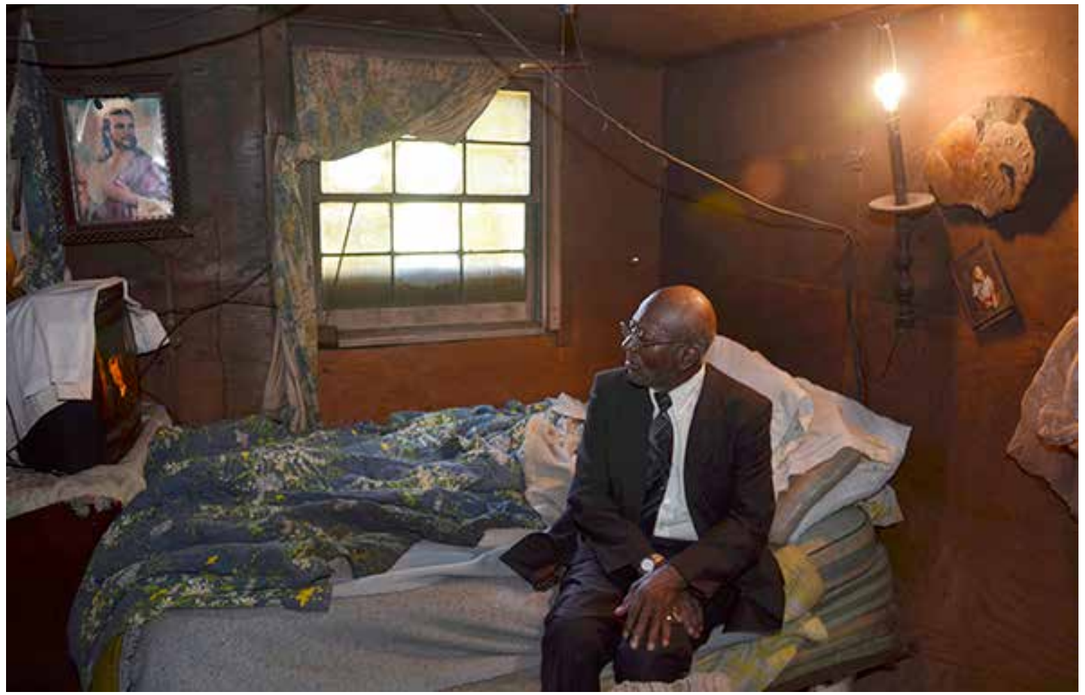
In the 70'es I took thousands of photos of shacks with the idea to give them to the Schomburg Collection in Harlem in the belief they would soon be history. How wrong I was. I still see dilapidated shacks everywhere. Here are a few from my last tour in 2012.

2003 - Union Parish, LA

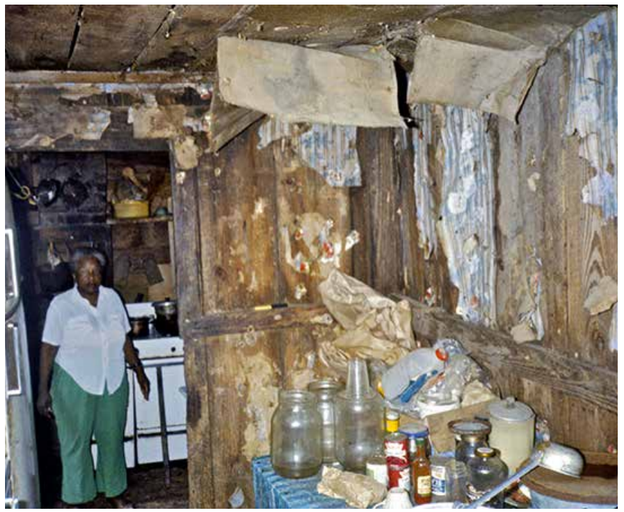
2012 - Preacher returning home from church, Perry County, AL

2012 - Old man with cell phone in his shack, Perry County, AL

2009 - St. Francisville, LA - 98-year old blind woman



2012 - Preacher relaxing in his shack after church, Perry County, AL



Left 1975 - rural Tuskegee, AL - Below and top 1975 - rural Bullock County, AL

1973 - Orangeburg County, SC

Psychic Leaps from Earth to the Moon

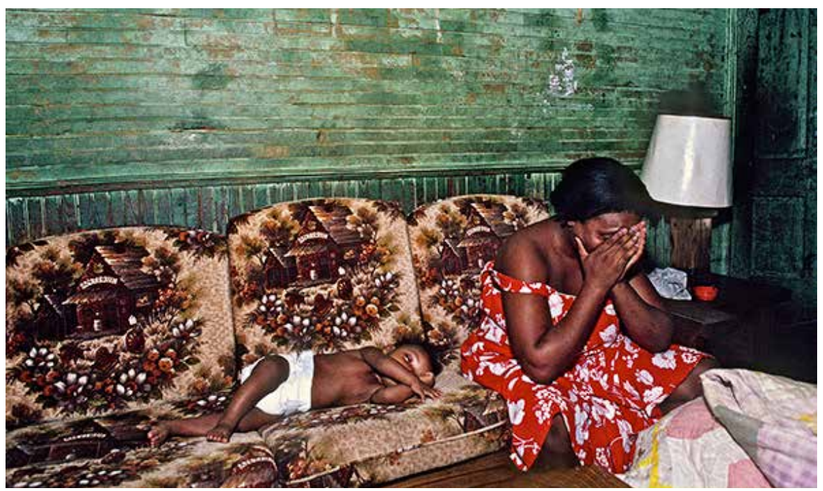
"Poverty is a cage. It's a cage that's hard to escape. And it's a cage that's made of more than just economic hardship. It's made of shame, and fear, and isolation." - Jesmyn Ward, "Sing, Unburied, Sing"

"I grew up in a one-room shack, but I always had books to read. I knew there was a world beyond the one I lived in." - Oprah Winfrey

Similarly, I felt it difficult to photograph America's rich upper class. Unlike today's boastful rich, the rich displayed guilt in the 1970s. The gap between rich and poor has grown dramatically since the 1970s, when the US had achieved its greatest equality ever. At that time, the upper class allowed only "modest" mansions and ranches around the country. I could only photograph one room at a time, which in no way showed the true dimensions of their mansions. Although the photographic gap between rich and poor was small, the psychic leaps I took from shack to plantation home or urban ghetto to millionaire home always felt as if I'd taken a trip from Earth to the moon.
So I used Søren Kierkegaard as my pocket philosophy:
The philosophy of our time is like the rich man who on a dark but starry night, goes out in his comfortable carriage with its brilliant headlights and carries his own light and darkness with him. He enjoys his security and the light which is cast on the immediate surroundings, but he does not understand that this strong glare dazzles him and prevents him from seeing the stars which the poor peasant, on foot or in his lamp-less cart, can observe to perfection in the vastness of the sky.

1973 - Natchez, MS

1974 - Palm Beach, FL



1995 - Montgomery County, AL

1974 - Alachua County, FL

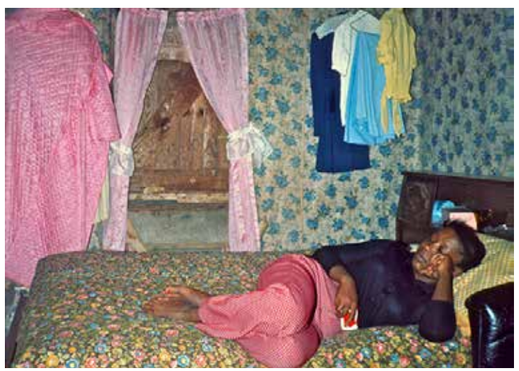
1971 - Newton, MA - See update with Marly Sockol below

1974 - Daytona Beach, FL

1974 - Cambridge, MA

1975 - Oglethorpe County, GA

1974 - Greenville, NC



1975 - rural Burke County, GA

From movie with Marly Sockol about how my depression - after she broke up with me in 1971 - sent me on a flight into the ghettos

On Hitchhiking and Psychic Leaps

"Sexism has never rendered women powerless. It has either suppressed their power or exploited it." — bell hooks, Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism

Hitchhiking in America is a constant attempt to overcome people's fear and make picking you up a positive experience. When you see the thrilling red brake lights and rush up in the dark, tearing open the car door only to look down the barrel of a frightened driver's gun, you know that it is for your mutual benefit and safety that you're being forced to show your passport of the contents of your pockets. Trust can be promoted with a nice, elaborate sign. I experiment with all kinds of slogans, like "Saving fuel for you" (during the 1973 fuel crisis) and "Bible Belt—and no Good Samaritan?" But sadly, the only thing that gives people real confidence is advertising that I am not American.

Trust is essential for demographic hitchhiking. Rides with women are seen by hitchhikers as a special psychic encouragement and security after all the aggressions of so-called "rednecks" and "perverts." But women are also a problem. Since foreigners usually find white American women extremely open and, unlike female drivers in Europe, often invite you home, they make themselves extremely vulnerable. On the one hand, it is important to let the woman set the boundaries of the new friendship. In this way, there is some chance of avoiding the sexism that will inevitably be imposed on you as a man. Society has never given you the choice of becoming a sexist or a racist, instead you are left to try to counteract the negative actions that cause so much suffering. Without an awareness of your suffering, you are bound to hurt the oppressed with your "master vibrations." On the other hand, as with male drivers, you cannot just float into any situation since you can easily cause hurt feelings. Being a good vagabond is harder than being a tightrope walker. Even the most competent vagabond makes mistakes here, not least because you are so vulnerable yourself, and the immense hardships of the road often make you fall in love with types you would never open up to otherwise. I had a striking experience with such harmful signal misinterpretations when a driver offered me the so-called "love drug," MDA, which makes you feel unbelievably in love with all people. But the next ride I had was with a stiff 80-year-old woman who couldn't help but be affected by my uncontrollable love and in the course of the next few hours, began to behave like a teenager in love. So we were both a bit disappointed when the euphoria wore off.

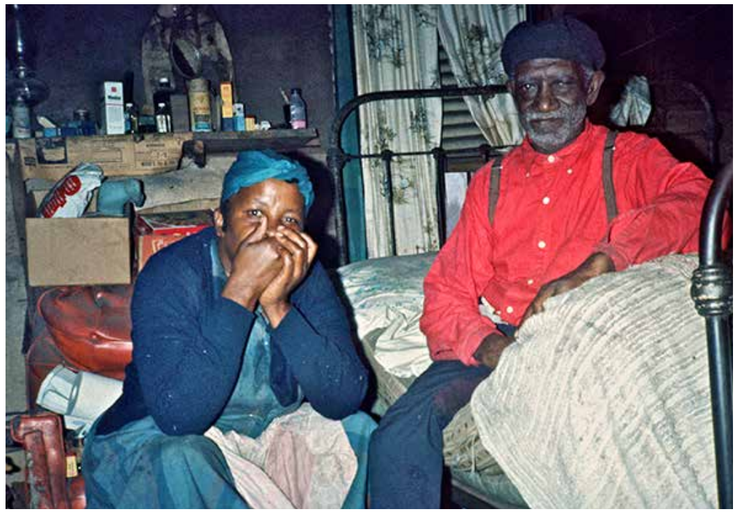
One of the most beautiful things you can experience as a vagabond, however, are such relationships with old people that you somehow managed to avoid in normal life. Seniors are the most harmonious group for the hitchhiker since unlike working people, they live with the same sense of time as the vagabond and can also add the important fourth dimension to your journey: historical perspective. When you hear them say things like, "What this country needs is another Great Depression to bring us all together again," you experience the enormous alienation that makes being with the vagabond so important to these people. But the hyperactive ones can kill you with their psychic jumps! In Florida I was picked up by a 72-year-old rich man, the infamous "Wild Bill" Gandall. When he heard I was a photographer, he made me his private photographer. He wanted me to expose the "filthy rich" of Palm Beach and took me to the most exclusive parties, where we wallowed in champagne, women, and multimillionaires. Immediately afterward, he would take me and luxurious gifts to the black slums of West Palm Beach or the slave camps outside the city. The next moment he would drive around to report these "criminal" conditions to the police, courts and city councils. From six in the morning until two at night, he would storm and rage about the injustices. If we were lost, he would stop anywhere and ask for directions. One night he was outside a packed suburban church. He ran in, stopped the service, introduced me as a pastor's son from Denmark, then preached a thunderous, indignant sermon, after which he led the choir. After half an hour, the congregation was in fits of raucous laughter, and he suddenly remembered his real mission and sent the congregants to their cars to get maps, after which a large circle was formed on the church floor to find Indian Road. Each day he had new projects. One day he learned from some young people about "organic farming" and was so inspired that we immediately set out to get four truckloads of manure from the Everglades to fly to his estate in the Bahamas. After such a week, I was totally defeated from lack of sleep and perspective and had to leave. Oh, how I enjoyed the freedom of the highway again! But the next trip was with an 82-year-old woman who was so hyperactive that she only slept while I was driving. Fortunately, after a few days she sent me up to Philadelphia to pick up one of her cars. If she hadn't let me use her credit card to invite my poor friends from the tobacco fields, hadn't let me pick up bums and hitchhikers and take them to the finest restaurants on the way back to Florida (and thus let me adorn myself with borrowed feathers), well, it could easily have ended in a mental defeat instead of another psychic leap.

Letter to Mog, an American friend.

Psychic leaps between the victims of apartheid

"The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion. The bridge between what is and what ought to be is made by human choices." - Audre Lorde

One reason I can never get tired of traveling in America is that it's the only country I know of where you can take such contrasting journeys almost daily. Sometimes, when I lived with, for instance, a poor welfare mother in a northern ghetto, I would go hitchhiking north of the city, where the rich people live, in order not to burden her food budget. Often I was picked up by a well-off businessman, and when I entertained him with my travel stories, I would occasionally be invited home for dinner in his big home with central air- conditioning. During dinner I'd tell about how the mother with three children in the ghetto rarely could afford decent food. If I was with a conservative family, sooner or later they'd usually say I was certainly welcome to live with them so that I didn't have to return to those conditions. But liberal families would generally load me up with expensive food items from the freezer and drive me all the way to the border of the ghetto and give me money for a taxi the rest of the way. "Here comes Robin Hood," I would say and laugh proudly when I came home. Being a good vagabond, I'd learned, is a matter of give and take. One doctor in Skokie gave me eight pot roasts for a welfare mother in South Chicago, and a businessman in North Philadelphia gave me a big bag of tokens so the son in my family in South Philly wouldn't have to walk to Temple University



Both from 1973 - Orangeburg County, SC

1973 - Orangeburg County, SC

1973 - Orangeburg County, SC

"Poverty is not an accident. Like slavery and apartheid, it is man-made and can be removed by the actions of human beings."
- Nelson Mandela

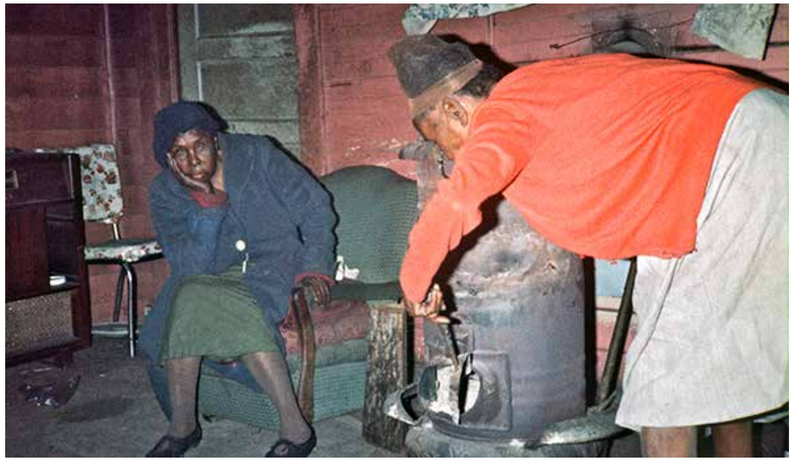
I rarely found the same effusive compassion for the poor in the South, but I experienced psychic leaps there too. One morning I was cutting firewood for this 104-year-old woman in South Carolina. She and her 77-year-old daughter, Scye Franklin, usually had to cut their own firewood. Their shack resembled one from the era of slavery though it had a well (many did not). Scye's husband was 97, and all three slept in the same bed to keep warm when the fireplace turned cold in the morning. Their house was owned by the white landlord (living behind the trees in the rear), to whom they paid $30 a month.

Since then, when I hitchhiked and showed drivers my photos, they'd say, "You must have taken these in the '60s." I'd say, "Well, come and visit my friends in that shack right there in the fields." Then they'd sit with Scye's family, looking down in disbelief and shame at the wide cracks in her floor, then give her some food and me a few dollars for my photography. These donations enabled me to lecture for the next 40 years, and I often brought my wealthy students and friends—such as multimillionaire Anita Roddick here (owner of the cosmetic chain The Body Shop)—to visit my friends in the shacks, even after the year 2000. Anita later sent them big checks and wrote about them her books, "Poverty shames us all. I tried to see if The Body Shop could set up a small-scale economic initiative within the communities that we visited."

1994 - Anita Roddick in Bullock County, AL

The meeting between the super-capitalist and the sub-proletariat is always mutually rewarding.

Here is a link to Anita Roddick's article in The Body Shop about our travels together. She came with me to try to invest in the impoverished Black community, but she lost hope when she saw the hopelessness in the Black Belt.



1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Washington, NC

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1974 - Washington, NC

Privileged Witness: Confronting My Whiteness in the Face of Black Pain

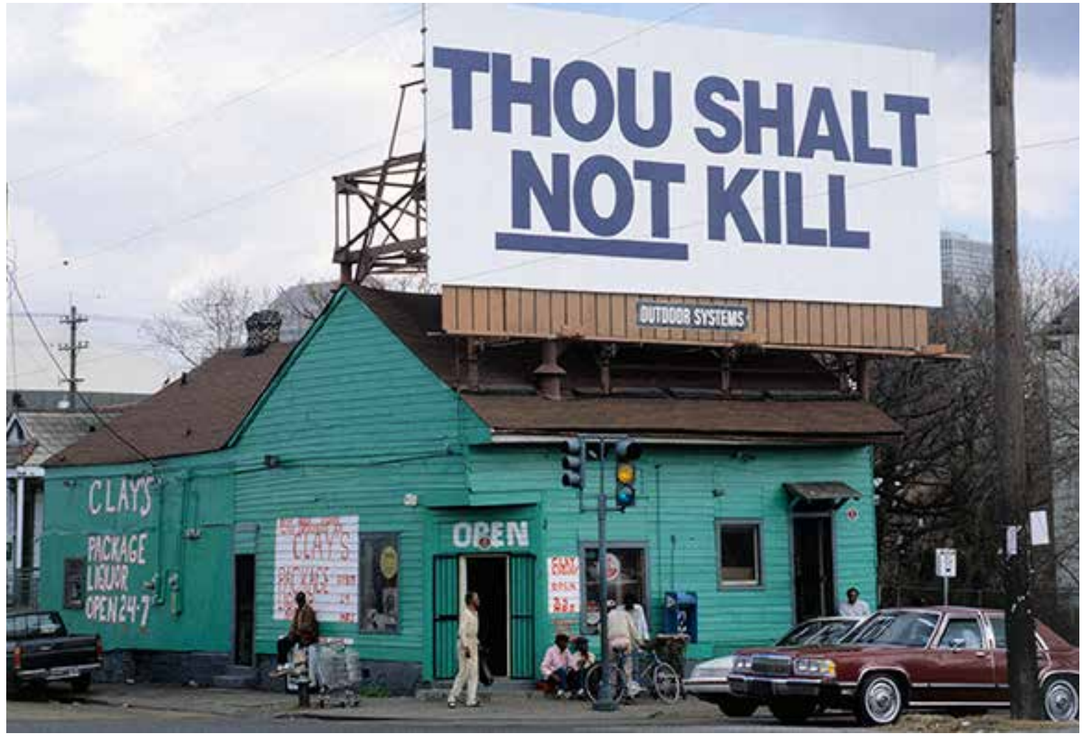
"White America has built its house on the negation of Black America. [...] And when Black people challenge the structure of that house, the very act of challenge is met with accusations of hatred." —Ta-Nehisi Coates

To switch environments so fast could be shocking when the physical distance was only a few miles. But when you roam about for many years, you realize that such psychic vagabonding is necessary for your survival. Having been shaped by a middle-class Danish environment, I found it overwhelming to live entirely in ghetto homes for very long with their overcrowding, constant noise, and psychic oppression. After a while I found it necessary to search out to more affluent homes where I could spend a few days in my own room and get peace of mind. But I soon got bored here and found my way back to the ghetto homes.
In Washington, NC, I lived in four black homes, three of them without electricity or running water. When I stayed with this young woman, Cay Peterson (seen beside the kerosene lamp), I had to sleep all night in an armchair since she was sleeping on a couch with a baby. There was no more space. My situation was even worse the next night in a shotgun shack where the mother screamed all night in a piercing soprano at her son, James Paige, because he'd brought a white guy home to share his bed. I hid his pistol in a stack of clothes for fear they'd use it against each other. In another shack I was kicked out by an angry neighbor who hated whites. It was hard to understand this constant rejection by most blacks, who refused to let a white inside the doors. I didn't at first see that this was a natural reaction to our own white rejection when in precisely those same years we actively pushed millions of blacks into ghettos. "You must not fraternize with the oppressor," said our outcasts, seen in parallel today among Europe's marginalized Muslims.

"Privilege is invisible to those who have it."
- Roxane Gay

"The walls around us are invisible, but they are there just the same, dividing one from another, rich from poor, white from black. We must break down these walls." - Rosa Parks

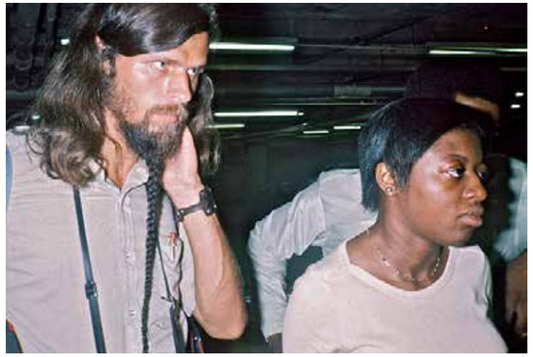
The conditions in these homes were so miserable that in the end I walked around with a constant headache from hunger and lack of sleep. One night I was so sick and overwhelmed with fatigue that I found myself on my way to the city jail hoping to be allowed to spend the night there—an escape I'd never sought before. But, as always, when I was exposed to pain and suffering, the gates of heaven opened up. Without this almost religious belief, the vagabond cannot survive. Just before jail, a young white woman picked me up and took me to the most lavish home I'd lived in in a long time. There were private tennis courts and golf courses as large as half the ghetto in that town, an indoor swimming pool—even airplanes and sailboats. In the ghetto homes, I'd been able to hear every sound, whether outside or private, through paper-thin walls. Here we had an intercom to communicate between the different wings of the house. There was even an indoor fishpond as big as some of the pools in the shacks when it rained. Where had all this abundance come from? The answer's not always so simple, but people later told me that the woman's father, a lawyer, owned many of the dilapidated ghetto shacks in this town, a town where 60% lived below the poverty level. I wondered how I'd ended up in his home just when the misery he'd helped create in the ghetto had practically driven me to prison. Again, I felt the blacks' indictment of my white privilege and how everything in society forces us immigrants into the white side of the pattern of oppression in the US.



1992 - New Orleans

1975 - San Francisco

1974 - New York, NY



1975 - with Joan Little, Raleigh, NC

1975 - Angela Davis in Oakland, CA

Brutalized Innocence: American Violence Begins with the Message to children

"Capital punishment is the ultimate denial of human rights. It reaffirms the idea that the taking of human life is permissible, but I don't believe that taking a life, no matter how heinous the crime, can ever be right."
- Maya Angelou

Others were not so lucky. Just then a black woman whose family I knew was sitting in the city jail. She'd been raped by the white prison guard and soon became world famous because she, Joan Little, killed the rapist. White rape of blacks is not uncommon in the South, but it was startling that Joan Little had had the courage to kill her rapist. Without a major human rights campaign, she would've been sentenced to death in this state, where even burglary was punishable by death.

All over the world, children are born with open and loving minds, with an appetite for life. But in America this innocence is brutalized early on by the government's harmful and incomprehensible message— that it's right to take another person's life! This brutalization they reenact later in life, whereby the violence increases, whereas in Denmark it decreased when we abolished the death penalty.

The psychic leaps I'd made in Joan Little's hometown had coincidentally given me insight into the economic preconditions for white supremacy. Such contrast journeys are necessary to see society clearly. I can't, e.g., stay long in white homes before I begin to see with their eyes, to see "negroes" as inferior.

Oppressors around the world develop a similarly devastating view of those they have harmed.

I always try to be open to such brainwashing, for if you don't allow yourself to enter the worldview of the oppressor, you have no opportunity to love them and understand the pain we get when, as open and loving children, we learned to dehumanize our closest neighbors. Without understanding our deeper motives and pain, I wouldn't be able to understand why racism continues generation after generation despite our lofty ideal of "love thy neighbor." In my years as a vagabond, however, I was always able to break out of this brainwashing and return to black culture.

Credo

"All art is a kind of confession, more or less oblique. All artists, if they are to survive, are forced, at last, to tell the whole story." — James Baldwin

"Sometimes being a friend means mastering the art of timing... it is a matter of recognizing when it is time to walk away." — Octavia Butler

Dear Edwina.
I'm finally in a house with a typewriter, which gives me a chance to tell you a little about what's happened since we were last together. I have come to live with two young white women here in Greensboro. They treat me like I've gone to heaven, which is overwhelming after the last few weeks of a helter-skelter existence. One of them, Diane, is a model and a left-wing criminologist, and she likes my pictures so much that she will do everything in her power to get me money to buy more film. I'll have to wait at least six months, but she's promised to raise some money for me by telling people it's for a home for handicapped children or something. I think that sounds a little unsavory, but she says that maybe it will teach them that it is the government's job to provide such human rights and not something that should be left to private charity. Well, I doubt she will really be able to collect anything for me. Every time I have had such a small hope, I have been disappointed. I guess I will have to make do with selling blood and the little money I get on the road by entertaining people with my pictures and experiences. Last week I had an income of nine dollars, which is the best I have ever had: five dollars from an interested salesman who picked me up, two dollars from a black woman in Tony's dad's grill, and two dollars from a guy in West Virginia who thought my picture of the junkies with the Capital in the background was interesting and bought it. Included in the deal was his lunch bag, which contained three chicken legs.

Now that I have had my photo books made, it makes me so happy every time I get that kind of positive reaction. But it also scares me a little sometimes. In one place, a woman started crying when she saw my pictures, and I didn't know what to do. It is strange with the Americans. They have lived all their lives in the midst of that suffering without thinking about it, and then suddenly, when they see it frozen in a photograph, they can start to cry. Some people accuse me of beautifying black people, I just don't understand it; I photograph them exactly as I see them, and a photograph doesn't lie, does it?
But the more I think about it, the more I realize that this parallax shift in the way we see black people must be due to the fact that they have lived in this master-slave relationship for so long that they are simply incapable of seeing black people as human beings, but can only see those aspects of them that confirm their "slave nature".
But when Southern whites respond positively to my pictures, I believe it is because they are actually unhappy to see with these "master" eyes. They yearn to become human, and the moment I can "prove" to them that black people are human and not slaves, eternal children, or subhuman, it makes them human themselves and no longer masters or superhumans or whatever. If I don't interpret it that way, how do I explain that even the worst racists down here give me money now and then, even though they mumble something about how they think "it's funny how I walk around taking pictures of niggers." I have to admit that when I try to portray the master-slave relation-

1973 - Natchez, MS

1975 - eastern Meridian, MS - today a shopping mall

ship as an institution, it often seems difficult not to end up portraying it as if the people in the system really have that "nature.

I often feel that my own view is tainted by this insidious poison in the South, because I make a point of respecting the dignity of these people, especially the elderly. They have lived in this master-slave tradition all their lives, and I feel that it would be a violence to both blacks and whites to try to rip them out of this tradition (though the coming generations must absolutely avoid this crippling of the mind). Therefore, I never try to impose my views on them, but try to understand theirs and learn from them. Precisely because I respect their dignity from the beginning, I often build such strong friendships with them that through these friendships I can get them to respect and learn from my point of view. As a vagabond in the South, it is absolutely necessary to be able to communicate through friendship instead of creating hostility and confrontation.

But if you are able to do that – and even receive constant love and admiration, as I am lucky enough to do, or hear sentences like "I envy you" or "Do you know you are a very lucky person? – Then you are walking a fine line where your internalization can easily get you stuck in the mud.

This gap between my utopian reality (loving people by imagining them as people in a free society) and my actual reality (loving people as they are in their present unfree condition) is as difficult to bridge as a river that gets wider and wider, so that you slowly lose sight of the other utopian bank while you slowly drown in the mud on your own bank. However, it seems that if you interpret the "mud" (the actual reality) on this side of the river correctly (i.e., if you dig down to people's deepest longings, even if they do not yet see the connections between them), it will give you the material to build an ivory tower so tall and beautiful that you can sit up there and tell the people on the bank below how beautiful the other bank looks.

But since you yourself have had no personal contact with the other shore – a contact that could have changed your own charac-

1974 - Washington, NC

ter and entire soul – there is no way for you to communicate your vision to the people below, for they see no evidence that you yourself have actually been "touched" or changed. For visionary ideas do not necessarily make you more loving and compassionate than those who are struggling to help each other keep their heads above water (the challenge for most Americans today). So they quickly forget the message of your story, but they find the story of my un-American pictures so interesting that they allow you to build the ivory tower even higher, reinforcing and beautifying it. In the frustration and depression of not being able to get your message down to them, you become more and more insecure and have a greater need for recognition and admiration of the ivory tower you have built – even more than for their recognition of why you wanted to build it in the first place. Eventually you become so confused and insecure that all that matters to you is their approval of the tower itself, its beauty and form. And you build it higher and higher, until you reach those cynical heights where you can no longer really see either your own bank or the opposite bank, and they begin to look alike.

Moreover, you have reached such a height that you lose contact with the people on your own bank and decide to send your ivory tower in the form of a book, so that the people out there in the mud have something to entertain themselves with. Although you started out to build a bridge to the opposite utopian bank, you end up building a tower on your own bank. Instead of helping people out of the mud, you are actually making their situation worse, because you have now given them something to either rejoice or cry about right where they are, and you are thus reinforcing that muddy riverbank.
Moreover, your ivory tower is morally reprehensible precisely because it is built on a foundation of mud: your artwork is the direct result of exploiting the people you originally intended to help, and the higher your tower becomes, the further you remove yourself from their suffering. It is thoughts like these that have made me increasingly depressed in recent months. I keep hearing people say, "How I envy you that you can travel among the blacks like this," or something like that, and I realize that I have already distanced myself so far from the mud. And when I realize, in spite of this longing, the impossibility of building a bridge, I can become so desperate that I feel the gun should be my real weapon, not the camera. But then the question immediately arises as to which direction I would shoot, since I feel, as you know, that everyone is equally entangled on this riverbank - and thus both guilty and innocent at the same time. Where is the rainmaker who created the mud puddle?

And so I continue to wade in the mud, trying to keep my camera clean enough to register the victims – without really believing that it will ever be of any use.

Well, but what I really wanted to tell you was a little bit about what has happened since we parted. One of the first people to pick me up was a wealthy Jewish businessman (Jews always pick me up to thank me because Denmark saved a number of Jews during the war, even though I wasn't even born then and even though I increasingly feel that I am as much American as I am Danish). He didn't really feel like taking me home, as he was completely down, partly because his business was going badly and partly because his brother was dying of cancer. He was heavily under the influence of tranquilizers, but he realized that he needed someone to talk to, so he took me home to his wife. It was a very powerful experience for me. Completely shaken, they waited from moment to moment for a call from the hospital saying that the brother was dead, and against this gloomy background my pictures made an enormous impression on them. When I left the next morning, they thanked me very much, and he tried to express the experience with tears running down his cheeks, saying, "I used to cry because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet. Before I left, he bought me 15 rolls of film.

From Philadelphia I went to Norfolk to stay overnight on my way south. I walked around the ghetto looking for a place to stay and talked to some of the old women who were out in the ruins of the ghetto with their little handcarts collecting firewood. One of them told me that because of inflation she could only afford four pig tails a day instead of five. It was strange to hear that in the shadow of the world's largest naval base. I ended up staying with a 32-year-old single black mother. She was not the type to invite me in, but her uncle had taken me to her apartment to show me how her ceiling was leaking, hoping that I was a journalist who could get the city to fix it.

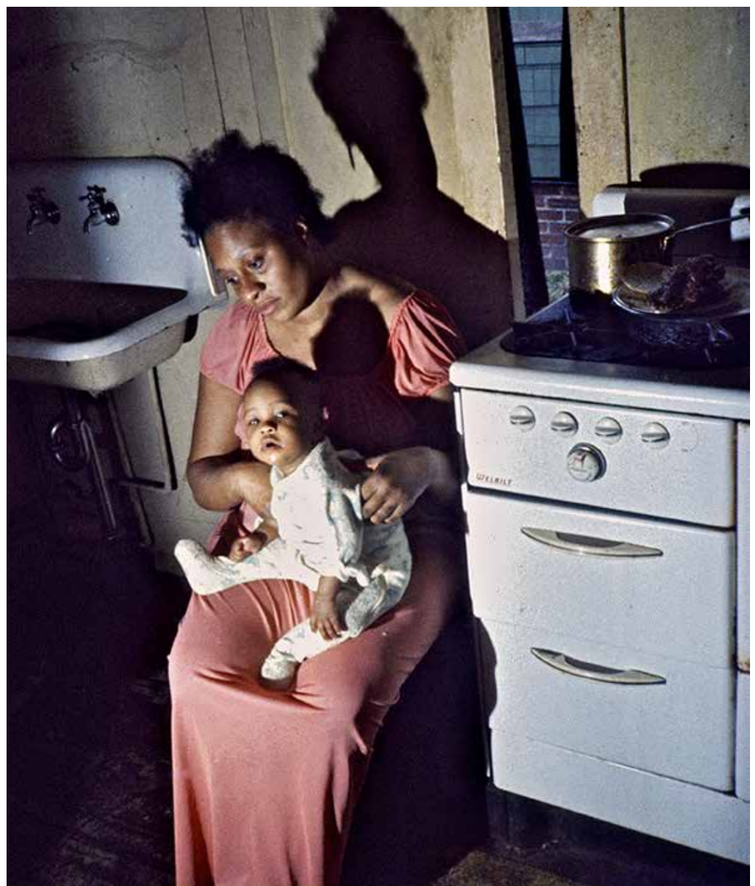
When he left, I got along so well with the woman that she let me stay. She had just had her first child and it was a wonderful experience to see her spend almost every minute taking care of it. I would sit and watch for hours. She was also deeply religious, and when the baby was asleep, we would sit and pray together, or she would read the Bible to me while holding my hand. She would sit there for a long time staring at a picture of Jesus right under the dripping ceiling with a look so intense and full of love that I was very moved. After a few days in the city, I drove down to Washington, North Carolina, arriving just after dark. I walked around all evening looking for a place to stay, but everyone was afraid of me, thinking I was a bustman. First, a

2004 - Philadelphia. My now deceased Jewish sponsors Allan and Bernice Tunick, 30 years later. Right 1974 - Norfolk, Va. The woman I lived with.

man told me I could sleep on his uncle's couch. He took me to an old red painted shack that was filthy and had no light. His uncle came out with an oil lamp in his hand and was extremely angry and used his stick to demonstrate, but we managed to get in and I got some old chicken legs on a dirty plate in the corner of the hut that served as a kitchen, although there was no running water.

But the old man was still angry, and it got worse and worse, and finally he threw me out with his stick. He wouldn't have any white people in his house, he thundered. Then he took big boards and planks and nailed them in front of the windows and doors for fear that I would break in, and walked off into the darkness, still screaming and yelling. He did not trust white people. Further down the street, a woman called from a porch and offered to share a can of beer. Later, as I sat trying to talk to her sick husband, who was in a wheelchair and unable to speak, I noticed her looking at a picture of Christ on the wall. After a while, she motioned for me to come into the incredibly messy bedroom in the back. I wondered what the husband was thinking, unable to move. There she first hugged me and stared at me with big, watery eyes. Then she suddenly fell at my feet, and while holding my ankles, she kissed my dirty shoes and whispered, "Jesus, Jesus.

As you know, I have often been "mistaken" for Jesus by Southern blacks because of my hair (which is one reason I keep my silly braided beard), but in most cases their sense of humor allows us to laugh together at their Jesus identification. You will probably see it as another example of the "slave's" identification with, or even outright infatuation with, the "master. Whatever it is, it probably helps me to break through the racial barrier. But in such a shocking situation, I simply didn't know what to say, not knowing if it would be wrong to shake her out of her religious experience. I searched for an appropriate Bible quote...the futility of the Samaritan woman who drank from Jacob's well...but I couldn't get a word out. I stood there for more than an hour before I had the courage (cruelty) to break her trance. It was such a powerful experience that I didn't feel I could stay there all night.

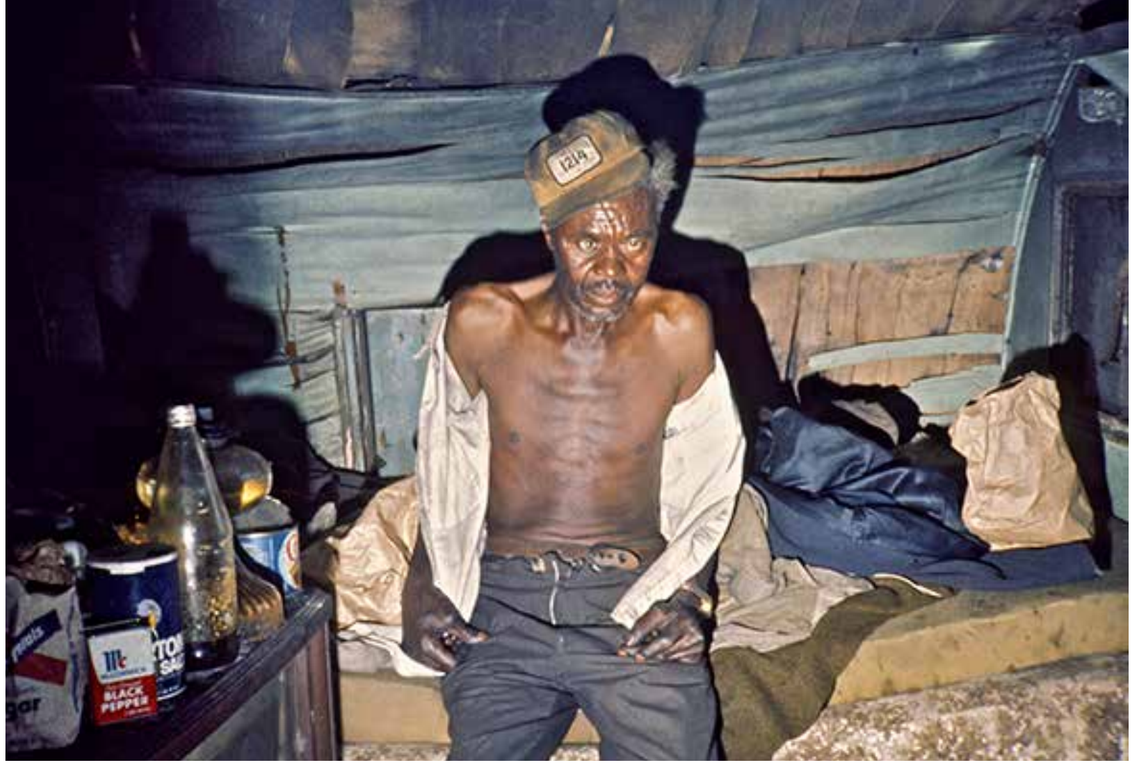


Wandering the streets again around ten o'clock, I met a young black woman who must have been a little drunk, because she immediately asked if we could be friends (unusual in my experience with black women in the South). She said that if I could find a place to stay that night, she would stay with me. I doubted it would work out, but we went to one of those Southern "joints" (speakeasies) and talked to her cousin about possible places. All of a sudden she started kissing me wildly all over and asked me sweetly, "Are you a hippie?" I said no, but she didn't get it. Actually, this place was not the safest place to be. Around us in the dark we could dimly see 15 to 20 "superflies". A couple of them came over and warned me in a friendly tone that it was a dangerous place, but I replied with conviction, "I'm not afraid of anything," which usually impresses them because they're afraid of their own shadows in these joints.

But then all hell broke loose. Someone must have told the guy the woman was "shacked up" with about me, because suddenly he came running in with a big knife and went for his woman first. Luckily, he didn't use the knife, but he beat the poor woman to a pulp, punched her in the face, and gave her the worst beating I'd seen in months. I must have been pretty cold-blooded that night, now that I think about it, because I immediately pulled out my camera and tried to attach the flash, but just then two guys came running over and grabbed me: "You better get out of here. When he's done with her, he'll come after you." And they practically carried me out of the place. I never saw that woman again. Even though I had seen this kind of thing so many times before, I was more upset because in a way I was the cause of it. With my perceived oppressor status, it's as if I can't achieve deeper human relationships without becoming either victim or executioner. Most of the time, of course, I am a victim (of understandable rejection), but because I always try to go all the way with people, I sometimes cross the invisible line between victim and executioner. I hate that, because then I am forced to take matters into my own hands instead of letting other people direct things. I didn't get that far tonight, though, and I'm beginning to fear that I've become so hardened that I've lost my own willpower.

Maybe it was this thought that was bothering me and made me react differently than usual later that night. After walking around for a couple of hours, I finally found a place to stay with two old bums. They were drunk as hell and the place was a mess. They couldn't even afford kerosene, so there was no light. All three of us were supposed to sleep in one bed. There was inches of dirt underneath, and every 25 minutes one of us had to get up to put wood on the stove because it was very cold. At first I slept between them, but then I realized they were both homosexuals. So I moved over to the wall so I only had one to fight off, but he turned out to be the horniest. Usually in this kind of situation I accept whatever happens, but that night I didn't feel like it, maybe because of the earlier experience in this place. He was what you might call a "dirty old man" with stubble and drool, but that was not the reason. I have been

1974 - Washington, NC with the Jesus woman and, four years later, when I gave her the book with the story of my first encounter with her.



1974 - rural La Crosse, FL, after a similar experience with Sam here. But the real picture of the two in this story can be seen on page 380

through much worse. I was probably just at the point where I was tired of being used by gay men. I hate to hurt people, but I guess that night I wanted to prove to myself that I had at least some willpower left. So I lay on my side with my face against the wall. But he was clawing and tearing at my pants so hard that I was afraid they would rip, and since they were the only pair I had, I couldn't afford to sacrifice them. So I turned around with my face to him, but he kept at it, pressing his big boner against my ribs and starting to kiss me all over – kisses that smelled like Boone's Farm apple wine. Worst of all, he kept whispering things in my ear like, "I love you. I love you. Oh, how I love you."

Well, that may have been true at the time, but it drove me crazy to hear it. As you know, I think that word has been overused, especially among black men. I don't think it's something you can say the first night you go to bed with someone. The only thing missing was for him to say, "Oh, you just don't like me because I'm black." But luckily I was spared that. Well, he finally got his pacifier, but that did not satisfy him, because he was the kind of homosexual who goes for the hard stuff. He just got more and more excited and finally got so horny that I felt really guilty, but I still didn't give an inch. He tried and tried. Finally he destroyed the beautiful leather belt you gave me when I couldn't keep my pants up. That made me so damn mad that I grabbed his big gun with both hands and turned it hard in the direction of the other guy who was snoring like a steamship. "Why don't you two have fun with each other and leave me alone. I want to sleep." But it didn't help, so the fight went on all night, with me turning the cannon the other way every five minutes (about four times between each new load of firewood).

Finally the guy left around eight o'clock and I got a few hours sleep. Later that day I ran into him at the local coffee bar. He came over and asked me if I was mad at him. I said, "Of course not, we are still good friends. I was just so damn tired last night." He was so happy that he started dancing around and made everyone there laugh at him. He was one of those outcasts among both blacks and whites. I was very sad because I felt that I had destroyed something in myself. I felt a deep irritation that I had not been able to give him love. In his eyes, I was kind of a big shot, and it would have made him happy if I had given myself completely. There was just something inside of me that went "click" that night, so the whole next day I felt a deep loathing of myself. I constantly find many shortcomings in my relationships with people, but the worst thing is when my shortcomings hurt such people who are already hurt and destroyed in every possible way by the society around them.

If I could not constantly give a little love to such losers, I would not be able to endure traveling as long as I have. The only thing that makes sense to me on my journey is to be together with these lonely and shipwrecked souls. My photographic hobby is, after all, nothing more than an exploitation of suffering that will probably never contribute to alleviating it. But I can't stop recording it, because one way or another it has to get out.

The strength I get from being together with these extreme losers, and the love I often receive from them, is what gives me the faint hope that my pictures will be able to speak to the winners of society. The fact that I reacted so negatively that night may be due to the fact that I recently had a similar experience that hurt me deeply. It was the same day I left you in Plainfield. One of the first people to pick me up on the street in New Jersey was a white man in his fifties or sixties. He immediately started talking about how he had always been the black sheep of the family and even used the term "dirty old man" to refer to himself. I often see this self-hatred in older homosexuals and resonate with the feeling, having been the black sheep in my own family for other reasons.

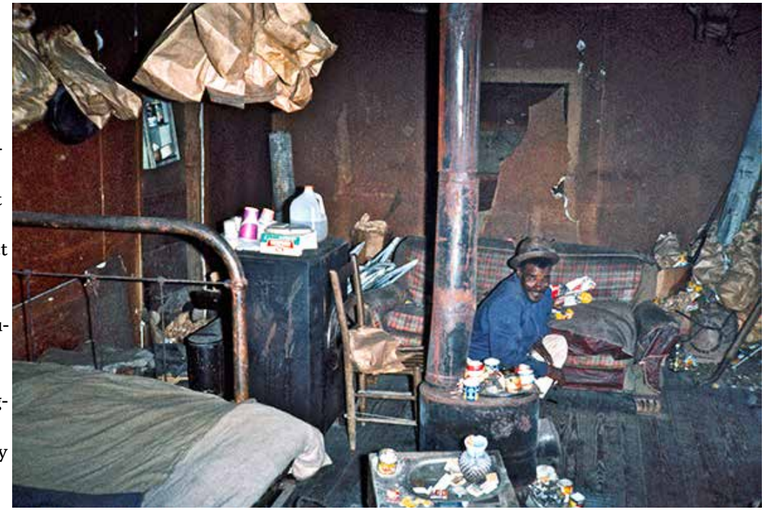
He asked me to go home with him and talk to him, and I couldn't say no, even though I had plans to go to North Carolina that same day. After we talked all day, he took me to the movie theater that night where he was the projectionist. He was showing a John Wayne movie of the usual type. In the middle of the movie, he started caressing my thighs. I wasn't really surprised, but I found it grotesque that he was standing there all the time commenting on the movie, especially the two-fisted scenes, and cheering John Wayne on: "Give it to 'em, knock 'em out," etc. How could he identify to such a degree with John Wayne's terrifying universe of male chauvinism and macho oppression, which more than anything else had oppressed him all his life and given him this violent self-hatred? During the intermission, I walked around the large shopping mall where the movie theater was located. Wherever I went, sales-promoting plastic music followed me from the loudspeakers, and I suddenly felt a terrible disgust for America, which I mistakenly equated with my John Wayne experience. But in the midst of this disgust, I felt that even though these people are so much their own oppressors, it must be possible to get through to them and break them out of this sadomasochistic pattern. In the evening, when I came home to him, I tried to see all the beauty in him. It was not easy, for he was indeed of that type that society has condemned as repulsive and obscene, but with all the energy I had just received from my stay with you, I had such a surplus that night that I really believe I felt glimmers of love for him.

But then the thing happened that would defeat me. In the heat of the night in bed, my wig slipped off and my long hair fell out. I could clearly see his astonishment and disgust, but he tried to hide it, muttering something to the effect of: "Well, at least you're not a dirty hippie." (When hitchhiking and to survive among conservative whites, I usually wore a short-haired wig and rolled up my 17-inch beard.) But from that moment on, our relationship was shattered, and I was never able to get him to open up again. He probably would have preferred to kick me out on the spot, but I was allowed to stay because it was pouring that night. Although he was small and had short, stumpy legs, he was so fat that I had to sleep all the way out on the edge of the bed and could only keep from falling off by supporting myself with one hand on the floor all night. So I couldn't sleep, I just lay there thinking about how strange it is that people can have prejudices so strong that they even take them to bed with them. Since it was still pouring the next morning, I wondered if I should stay another day and try to break through the ice, but that was obviously not what he had in mind. Almost without a word, he drove me out to the main road near Milltown, where I stood in the pouring rain for the next seven hours, because as you know, people never pick you up when you need them most. You must be crazy to stand in the rain, they think. It was then that the Jewish businessman finally fished me out. As you can understand, I was almost as low as he was, although I didn't tell him about my depressing experience.

Well, I will tell you more about Washington, N.C. in a later letter, and in closing I will say that I am now on my way out of the depression I was in about you at the time, although the memory of you still hangs like a heavy dark cloud over my journey. It is still a mystery to me how I could have been so hurt by our relationship and why it took the direction it did. Even though you are younger than I am, it developed into a mother-son relationship that I could not have imagined at the beginning of my love for you. Your strength and wisdom prevented you from being seduced into such an unrealistic relationship as ours would

have been. You belong to the black bourgeoisie, and although I loved throwing myself into your luxurious upholstered furniture, I should have realized right away that it wasn't my world. You were fascinated by my vagabond life and supported my project with your sense of black pride, but your pride was threatened by the world I represented. Ever since your ancestors were educated by the slave master, your family has perpetuated this class divide, and I can't help but feel that this mile-wide psychological gulf you were raised to feel between yourself and the ghetto in which I normally walked was what actually destroyed our relationship.

But no matter how I analyze it and try to understand it, I find it hard to accept that this is how it should end between us. The suffering I went through in your house is something I never want to experience again, but as a vagabond I have become so much of a fatalist that I believe it has been good for something and that it will make it easier for me to identify with and become one with the suffering of other people, although of course the suffering I see around me in this society is of a much more violent nature than what I experienced with you. Nevertheless, I will use the word "suffering" to describe the process I went through with you. Without that suffering, you couldn't have thrown me so off balance. From the moment you realized that we weren't right for each other, and your love cooled to a certain aloofness, I experienced a growing desperation within myself. I am not very aggressive by nature, as you know, and not even very self-protective, but faced with your initial rejection, I experienced an increasing aggression that became more and more unbearable. With all your psychological insight, you probably felt it. In any case, it flared up that night when I climbed into your bed uninvited and broke one of my traveling principles: never violate people's hospitality.



1973 - Zebulon, NC - My friend Lee in one of the first one-room shacks I ever saw

But if I really want to illustrate the psychological desperation I felt for you in my love, a desperation stronger than any I have ever felt for a woman, I can do no better than to let W.E.B. Dubois' well-known quote describe my state of mind:

"It is difficult to let others see the full psychological meaning of caste segregation. It is as though one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it; speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world. One talks on evenly and logically in this way but notices that the passing throng does not even turn its head, or if it does, glances curiously and walks on. It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that some thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. They get excited; they talk louder; they gesticulate. Some of the passing world stop in curiosity; these gesticulations seem so pointless; they laugh and pass on. They still either do not hear at all, or hear but dimly, and even what they hear, they do not understand. Then the people within may become hysterical. They may scream and hurl themselves against the barriers, hardly realizing in their bewilderment that they are screaming in a vacuum unheard and that their antics may actually seem funny to those outside looking in. They may even, here and there, break through in blood and disfigurement, and find themselves faced by a horrified, implacable, and quite overwhelming mob of people frightened for their own very existence."

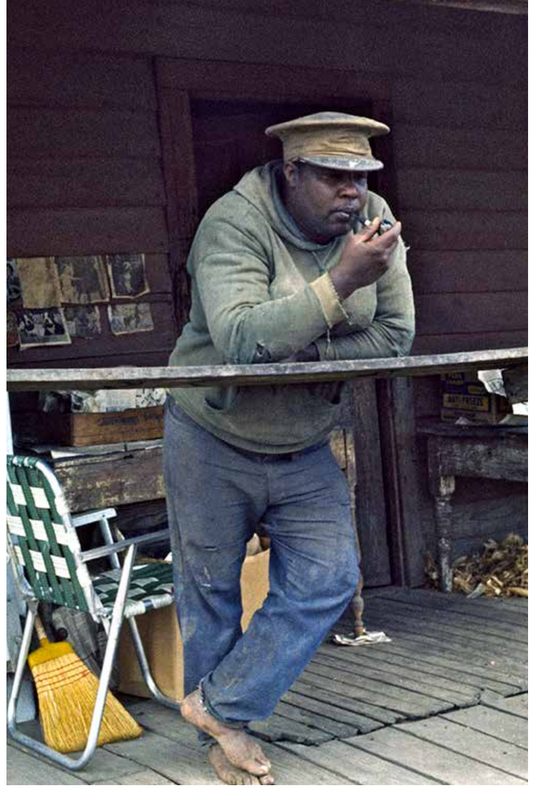
I don't think this picture of my state of mind at the time is much of an exaggeration, so crazy was my infatuation. But it amazes me that you could see so early on how one-sided our relationship was. A marriage between us, after all, would have had this invisible glass barrier between us, with me inside the cave to which I had devoted so much of my life, and you on the outside. With all your upper class nature, you could never have lived the life that I live in the cave and that I try to show to the outside world through my paintings. I know that in

1990 - Bullock County, AL - 96-year-old woman

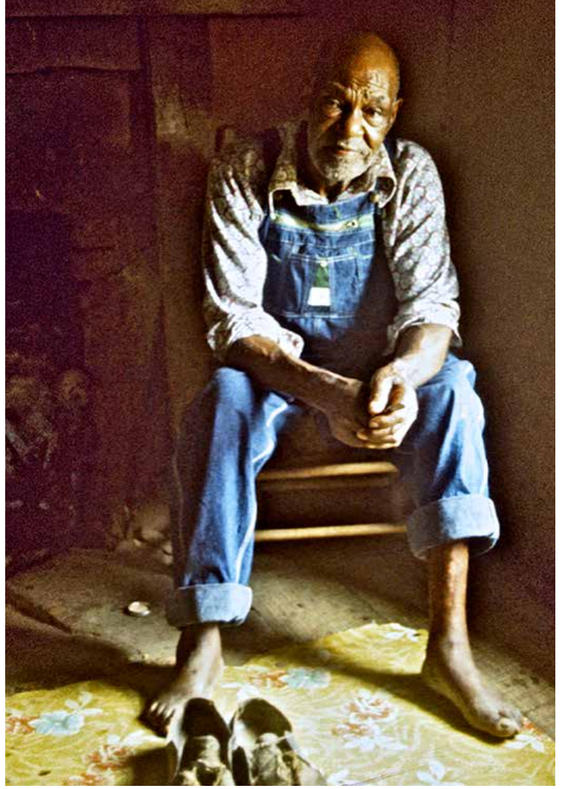
my mind, in one way or another, I will always be inside the cave, while you know as well as I do that you will always be outside, in spite of some insight into the cave. Every time I have dug too deep into the cave and felt lost, you have always been able to explain it to me with your wisdom and deep human insight and put everything into perspective. So it was not surprising that, despite my resistance, you became more and more like a mother to me. What I fear is that despite your understanding of the cave, you are still so marked by your class that at the critical point when the glass barrier is broken, when all is said and done, you will be found among the horrified and implacable mob. To avoid this, we must continue to work together. If a marriage between us was unrealistic and, for me in the cave, inevitably destructive, it is not unrealistic for there to be a deep friendship between us. If you continue to support and advise me, in such a friendship we can gradually break down that glass barrier and build a relationship of such strength and value as our two races will have in post-racial America when our common struggle is over. Through our continued friendship, I can build the bridge across the river so that my work does not become just a white man's ivory tower. My love for you is still more of an infatuation than a friendship. Your beauty and your soft, big afro, your soft, deep (and motherly) voice and your sweet lips that used to kiss me awake in the morning still torment me in my thoughts. But as soon as I come out of this cave-like state of mind, perhaps in just a few months, I will be back in Plainfield and we can begin to build our friendship – a friendship without which we will never succeed in breaking down the glass barriers and building a bridge to a new and beautiful America. Until then, you remain my beloved but distant and unreachable Edwina.

With love, Jacob.

1974 - Plainfield, NJ - Edwina's family in 2005 visited me in Denmark



1973 - Orangeburg County, SC

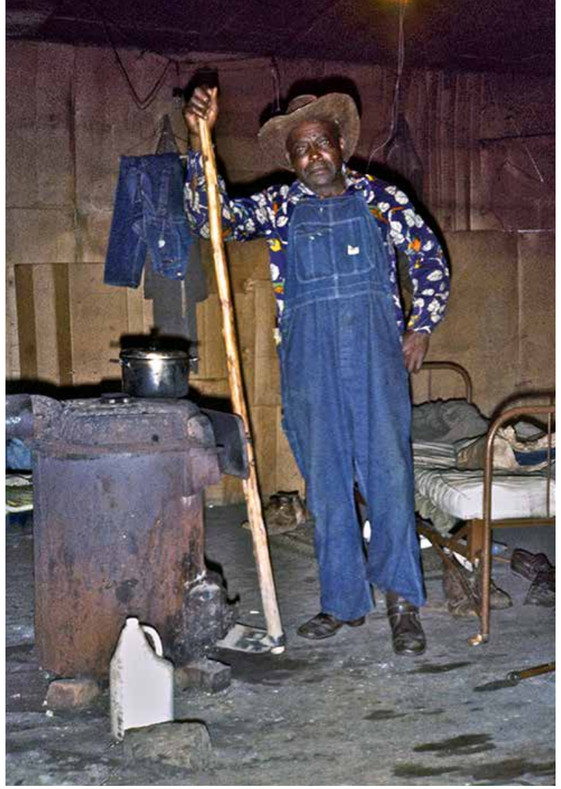


1975 - Bullock County, AL

From slavery to serfdom: The continued accumulation of wealth

"The legacy of sharecropping lives on in the persistent racial wealth gap, the lack of access to healthcare in rural areas, and the disproportionate number of Black people living in poverty." - Nikole Hannah-Jones

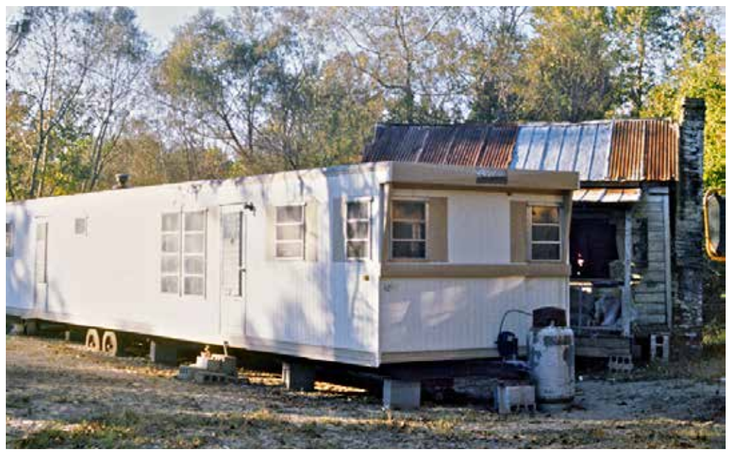
In Alabama I lived with Jack Ray, who'd established and owned several banks. Jack was one of the more liberal men in Alabama and employed blacks as cashiers. He was a loving empathic person, so it hurt me when he referred to them as "niggers," as people did around there. Often, as the poor tramp, I got a strong desire to get a formal education in order to embark on a career and rise to the upper class, but whenever I, as here, got a chance to live the so-called good life, it usually made me so sick that I quickly fled to the highway again. For where did all the money, with which Jack had bought his luxurious home outside the city, come from? He told me he'd made his fortune by giving loans to poor black sharecroppers so they could buy a mule or move from their rotten shack into a streamlined plastic trailer and join the new plastic proletariat of more than 20 million Americans. But many sharecroppers couldn't even afford these modern shacks. They have enough trouble paying off their mules and are in debt to both the bank and the white landowner, to whom they often had to pay the greater share of their crops, just as we in feudal Europe paid the church and the squire. The American system started after the Civil War, when neither planters nor freed slaves had any money. Driven by hunger to work for little or nothing, destitute blacks made agreements with their former slave-owners to borrow land, housing, and seed. The profit was supposed to have been shared. But debt and dishonest bookkeeping usually brought the sharecroppers into a situation materially worse than it had been under slavery (when the master at least had an interest in feeding them). The system has continued from generation to generation, and on top of the eternal debt to the landlord came the debt to the commissary store and finally the bank, all



1975 - Oglethorpe County, GA

1973 - Gadsden, AL

helping to create a white upper class. Already, when he picked me up in 1973, Jack Ray had made himself so rich he offered to fly me around in his private jet. I loved the patriarchal Jack and his stay-at-home wife, Jeannie, but when I returned over the years, I found that his banking empire had grown even larger, and he invited me to dinner at a club for whites only. As a sponsor of everything from scholarships to orchestras, he joined the Chamber of Commerce in 1993. The Jack L. Ray Family Park was named after him, but no blacks attended the festivities. Perhaps because his most important contribution to society was to help double the net worth of white Americans, from 6 to 12 times that of black Americans from the time I first met him until his death in 2006.



1973 - Gadsden, AL

How Peonage Shaped the Lives of Black Americans

"If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors..." - James Agee (white author), about tenant farmers during the Great Depression

Later, I visited this tenant farmer, who lived near the banker. Both he and his wife were 78 years old and should have stopped working years ago. But he said, "I have to work until I drop dead in the fields. Last year my wife got heart trouble, so now I must do the work by myself." Twice a year he walked to the local store to buy a bit of flour and a little sugar. That's all he ever bought. I asked what they ate for breakfast. "A glass of tea and a little turnip greens," he answered. What about lunch? "Just turnip greens," he replied. What then for supper? "Mostly turnip greens."

Another tenant farmer, skinning a rabbit, spoke with me:

- But often you went to bed hungry?

- Yes, sir, more times than not. But sometimes people would give us some bread or a meal.

- White people?

- Sometimes whites, sometimes colored. Sometimes we would have nothing and go to bed hungry. We went to bed a million nights hungry. Sometimes we wanted to hunt, but were too weak to catch rabbits.

My attempts in the 70's to find out about conditions for these sharecroppers ran into an almost impenetrable wall of fear and intimidation. I'd imagined that this fear was entirely historically conditioned. One night, however, after a visit to such a sharecropper, I was making the 10-mile trek down a dead end to my shack when I was "ambushed" by a pickup truck with its headlights on me and guns sticking out. I managed to talk my way out of this jam, but little by little I realized that such white intimidation was deeply rooted in the violent system of peonage, which has prevented sharecroppers and farm workers from fleeing their "debt" through beatings, imprisonment, and murder.

During World War II (in which the US was hailed as the Land of Liberty), the US Justice Department admitted that "there are more Negroes held by these debt slavers than were actually owned as slaves before the Civil War."

1974 - Charleston, SC

1975 - Notasulga, AL - Below 1973 - Orangeburg County, SC and right 1973 - Yazoo City, MS

"The sharecropper is trapped in a system that makes him a slave to the land, to the crop, to the storekeeper, and to the landlord." - Ralph Ellison, "Invisible Man"

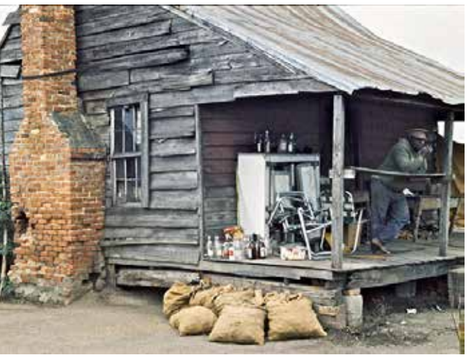
Yet the Justice Department did nothing to prosecute these slave owners, who even traded and sold peons to each other. Although there was an increasing number of peonage cases in the 1970s, only a few ended up in court, and only the cruelest, such as a case in 1980 in which a planter chained his workers to prevent their escape, reached the press (and the American public).

In the 1990s, The Atlanta Constitution ran a big story about a landowner who'd fled to the Bahamas, a tax haven, abandoning his debt-ridden tenant farmers, who had no idea whether they'd been bought or sold.

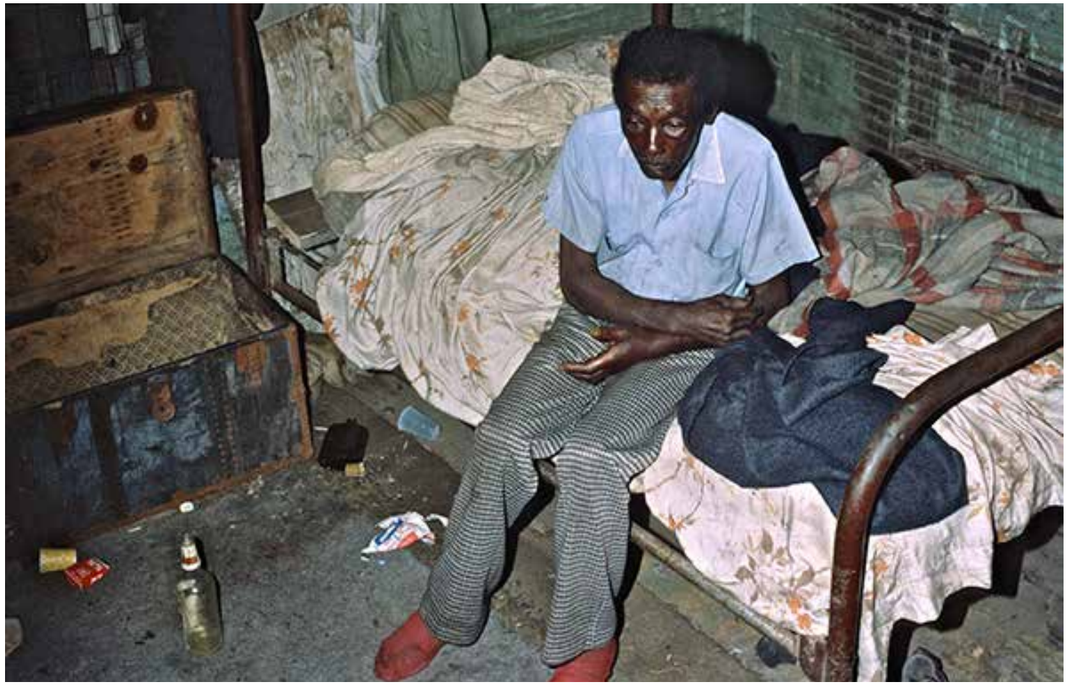
The more I began to penetrate this undercurrent of dread and terror, the more I felt that the 20th century had a far more violent influence on the black psyche than the so-called "historical slavery."

1994 - Pahokee, FL

1975 - Burke County, GA - Below left 1974 - Elizabethtown, NC and right 1975 - Bullock County, AL



Interview with above sharecropper



1978 - rural La Crosse, FL

1974 - Manhattan, NY

From mules to mink coats

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view - Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it." – Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

"If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing." — Malcolm X

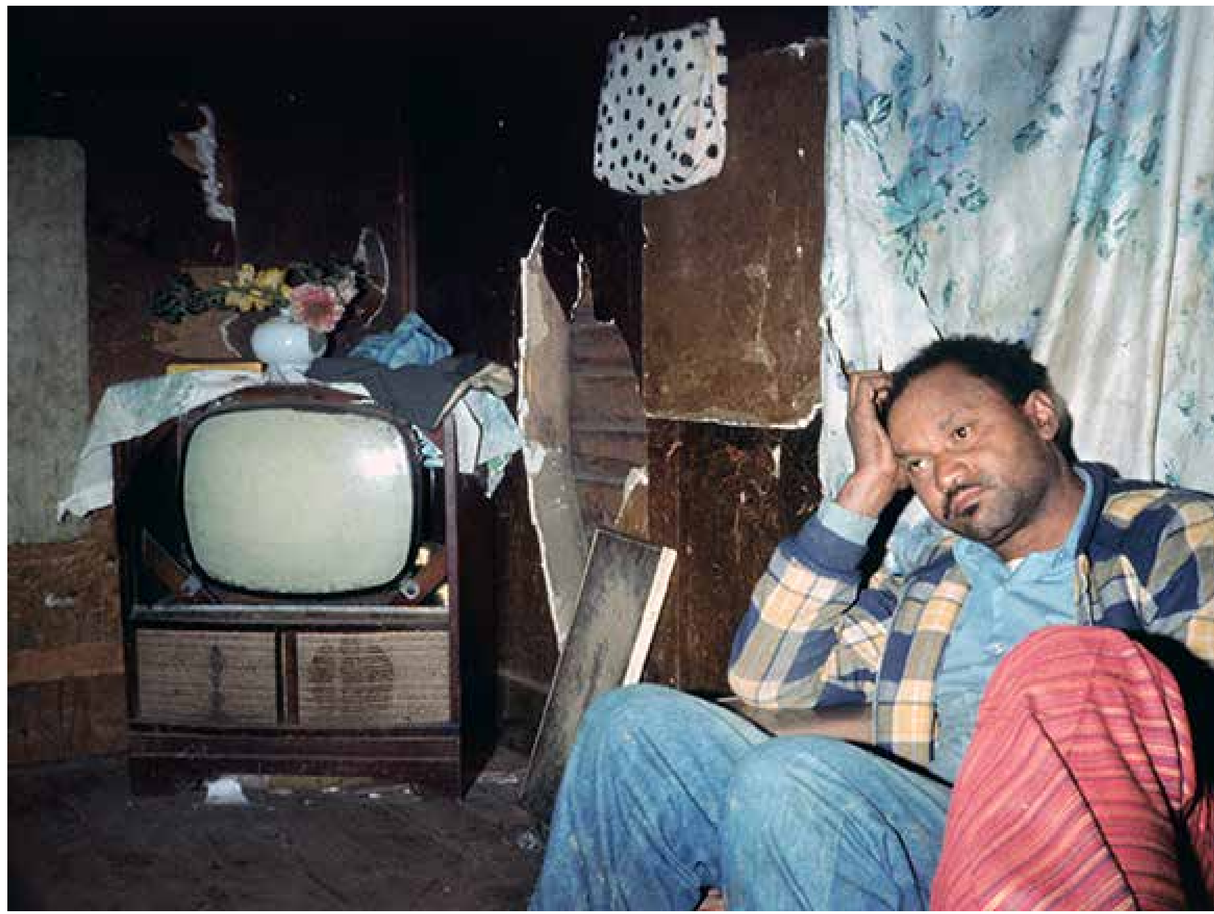
My friend Jack Ray, a recent beneficiary of this violent ignorance, unknowingly fit one more piece for me into the pattern of hunger and dread I saw in the rural underclass of the '70s. But even today both banks and the USDA gives far less loans to black farmers who are thus forced out.

1994 - Pahokee, FL

1973 - Gadsden, AL

Racism haunts all countries but is more visible in America because it's intertwined with ruthless class oppression—the biggest gap between rich and poor in the industrialized world. Without a protective welfare state to keep the market forces at bay, many are made so poor they lose both their freedom and the initiative to brave the market. When 2% today own 80% of all wealth in the US, it's easier to see where this banker's mink fur came from. The only thing he couldn't buy was real happiness. Again and again I see that the upper class is compelled to substitute mink coats, alcohol, nerve pills, and cocaine for personal happiness.
I began to feel poles apart from the prevailing white ignorance, which seems forever unable to understand why their own white ancestors could "make it" in a short time, while, after more than 100 years of "freedom," blacks still struggle.

1974 - Washington, NC



1973 - Zebulon, NC - Lefus Whitley

My deceptive Images: Unveiling the Dangers of Prejudice

Mosel and children 1973 – 5-year-old Gwen to the right

From left Kenny, Gwen with book, Rene, Betty Jean and Mosel in 1978.

Gwen with the book in 2003. As a lab technician she mails me about the family.

"The trouble with judging a man by his mere appearance is that you look at him and you judge him by your standards, which have grown out of your own experience. You don't consider the fact that he has had entirely different experiences." - Maya Angelou

" It's a sad funny ending to find yourself pretending/ A rich man in a poor man's shirt"
- Bruce Springsteen

How important it is to vagabond in the fourth dimension – with the time factor included - my friendship with Lefus Whitley shows. For pictures often lie even for the photographer himself. Lep, a gangster in New York, in 1973 invited me home to visit his parents in the woods of North Carolina. There I took the photo of his father Lefus drunk and apathetic at the TV on page 99. Such "honest" pictures of Lefus made it difficult later to get my show into high schools because the schools feared they would intensify students' negative prejudice of blacks as "lazy" and "apathetic". I am afraid I even myself saw him that way since every time I over the years visited him he was laying drunk on the floor except one time in 1991 when we made him sit up to look nice on Danish TV. I always needed the help of his son to find his family deep in the forest in new rotten shacks since he burned the previous down in drunkenness.
So my prejudice lasted 30 years until I in 2003 traveled around to make video interviews with my friends about their own perception of their lives, contrary to MY interpretations in my show. For both family and neighbors confirmed that Lefus had never missed even one day of work in his entire life. As a hard-working tenant farmer in his youth, he only drank a bit on weekends, but it worsened when he lost his land when white landowners forced out the remaining black farmers. He then became a construction worker, and his crew picked him up every morning at five

Lefus on Danish TV in 1992

Lefus died March 17, 2004, 77 years old.
I saw Mosel shortly before her death in 2008.

1973 - They always had TV.

The last time I saw Lefus was in 2003, when he had stopped drinking. See him talk about it in the video below.

and drove him to Raleigh where he built most of the skyscraper seen in the state capital today.
All those years he only drank after work and after giving his wife Mosel what she needed to raise the family – that is, when I was visiting in the evening. My superficiality came from the fact that I only visited in the evenings, but had never stayed with him because I always stayed with his son Lep. I had been "lazy", not Lefus, which again taught me never to judge people until we have lived with them 24 hours a day.
Years later Bruce Springsteen did the same mistake when he stole this picture to put on his bestselling "57 channels and nothing's on" album without asking or paying neither me nor Lefus a dime. Contrary to our stigmatizing thinking about people like Lefus as a "lazy freeloading n....." he had until his death March 17, 2004 never received any support from society. So why do we blame free let "high society" get away with both land grabbing and freeloading? Bruce Springsteen might be "Born in the USA", but as I always said, "my friend Lefus BUILT America!"

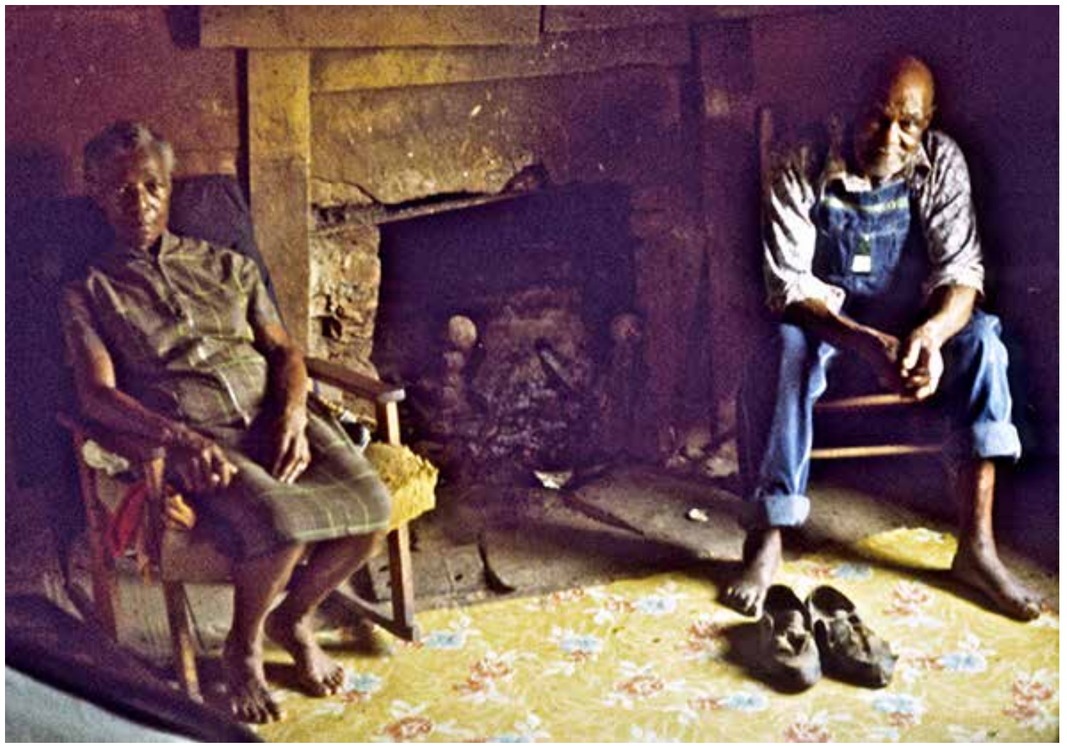
Long interview with Lefus Whitley about his life

Lefus became world famous in 1992

1996 - rural Selma, AL

1996 - rural Selma, AL

1974 - Washington, NC



1975 - Bullock County, AL (Mary's grandfather 102 years old, killed wife on left shortly after) See Mary on page 152)

Victims of caste inequality: Hunger's impact on children

"Hunger stole upon me so slowly that at first I was not aware of what hunger really meant." - Richard Wright, "Black Boy"

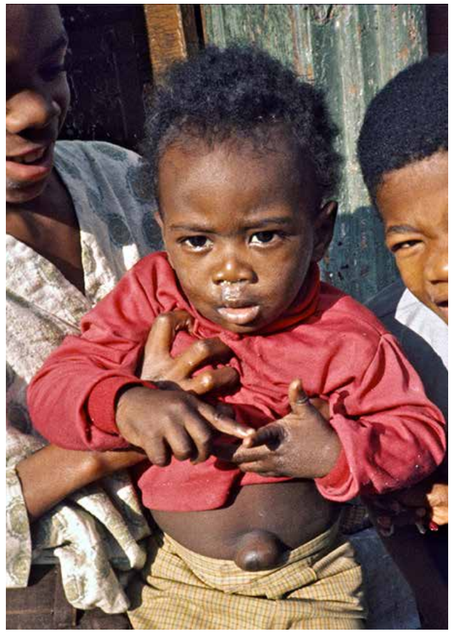
The hunger, and the reasons for it, which I saw around the banker were not unique. Traditional American wisdom insists that if a man goes hungry, he has only himself to blame—because he's unwilling to work. So why did I so often see the hungry work harder and longer than those causing their hunger? It's the children such social cynicism hurts most. Malnutrition gives them reduced resistance to disease, which is why starvation was usually called "pneumonia" on the death certificate. Everywhere in the South I saw these tiny tombstones hidden away in the fields. In many districts, infant mortality among black children was 8–10 times higher than among whites. In comparison, the black infant-mortality rate was only twice as high as among whites during slavery (as it is for the country as a whole today). In other words, more than 6,000 black babies die each year because they don't have the same healthcare and nutrition as whites. Even more of the infants could be saved every year if they had access to the same weekly visits by nurses before and after birth, which we take for granted in a welfare state like Denmark. Bangladesh has a life expectancy longer in 2021 than in 10 counties in Mississippi.

1974 - Vanceboro, NC

1974 - rural Greenville, NC

I found it difficult to photograph hunger since few were visibly emaciated. Many people, in fact, were overweight because they had to eat a lot of carbohydrates to get enough protein, like Blondie Ecell's mother (seen here). When I returned to give her a copy of the book, she was ashamed I'd referred to her as overweight. Since then, obesity has become so commonplace among the poor that much of the shame is gone. While we better-off whites previously criticized the lethargy of malnourished blacks, today we criticize their obesity.

I've often wondered whether, as a photographer, I myself discriminated while trying to change white racists with my pictures—or because I myself was subject to their racist views. But there's no excuse for hunger in a highly developed society. Contrary to racism, poverty and malnutrition are solely a result of how we vote. And since the 1970s Americans have voted in every election to widen the gap between rich and poor. (In 2021 13% of Black children were more than twice as likely to be food insecure as compared with 4% of white children). They forget that countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Japan, which have achieved the greatest income and health equality (and so don't crush the initiative of quite as many), exhibited the greatest economic growth in the world during the 20th century.



1973 - Baltimore

Yes, and it's happening right here in the U.S.A. Right this minute as you read these words. Who's Caroline? One of thousands of hungry children throughout the rural South suffering from a lack of nourishment so severe it affects her present health and the development of her mind and body.

In the words of a white Southern doctor to a Senate committee . . . "*Malnutrition* is not quite what we found; the boys and girls were hungry, weak, in pain, sick . . suffering from hunger and disease and, directly or indirectly, they are dying from them—which is exactly what *starvation* means."

A few years ago, the NAACP Emergency Relief Fund was established to do something about this critical situation. And it's working. In the last three years, alone, 112,968 of the neediest people have been assisted. What's more, by providing the money for buying Federal food stamps, the food purchasing value of this assistance has multiplied an average of nine-fold!

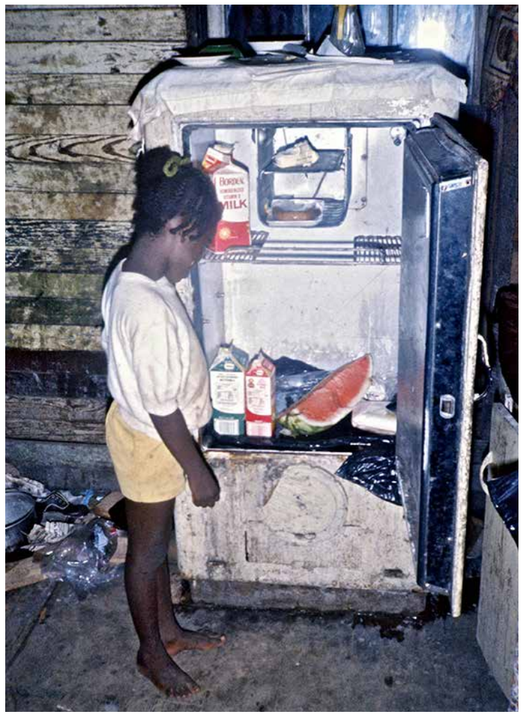
Thus your tax-deductible $10 contribution to the NAACP Emergency Relief Fund buys about $90 worth of urgently needed meat, milk and bread. Just $25 can feed a large family for a month!

Please help by sending as little or as much as you can. Today?

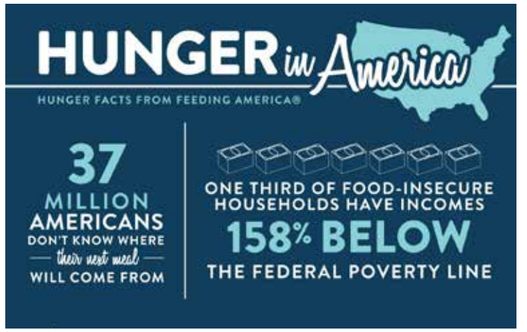
Thank you.

NAACP
EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND
DEPT. BB, BOX 121,

1973 - NAACP hunger add

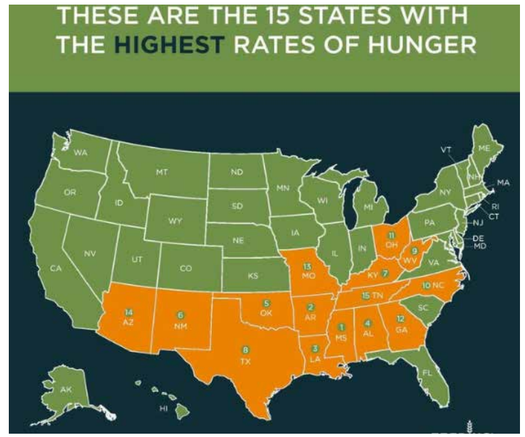


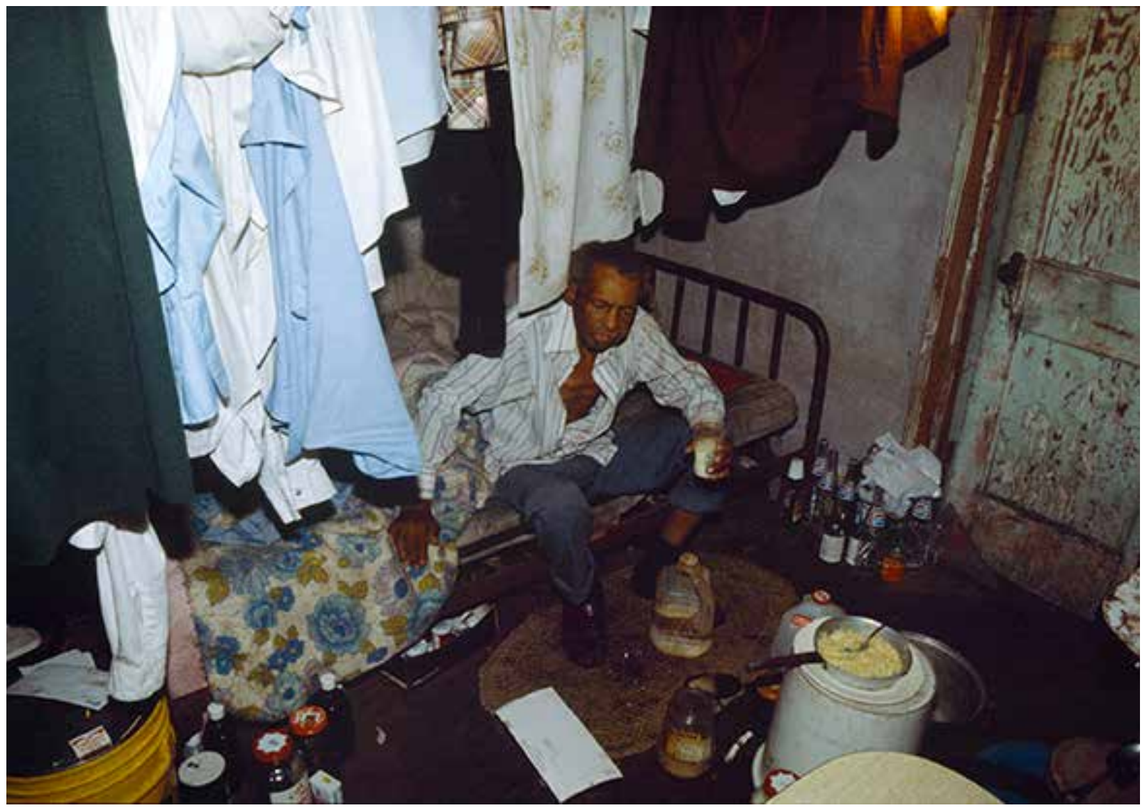
1974 - rural Pireway, NC
and below 1974 - Daytona, FL



Hunger advertisements from modern America.

Following Trump's massive tax bill from 2025, hunger is expected to hit many more people, benefiting billionaires.





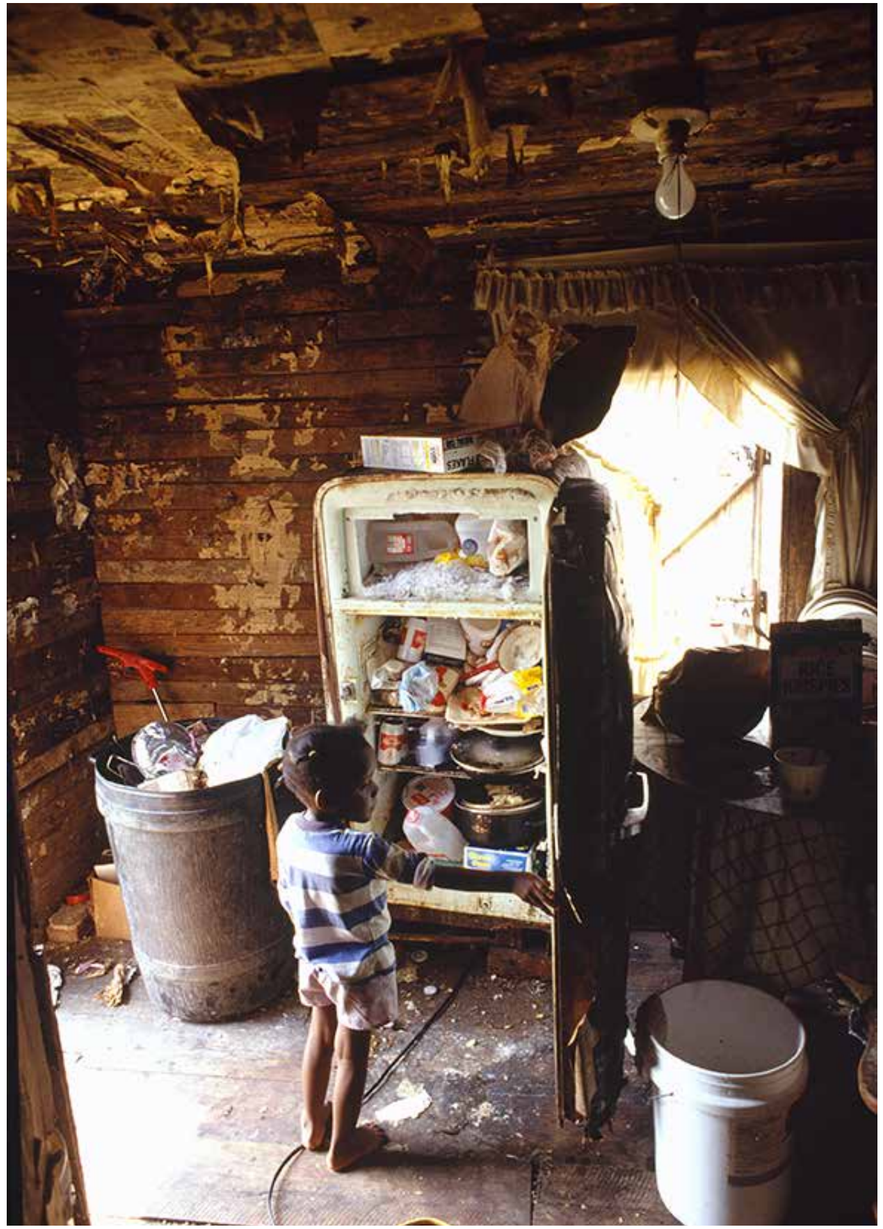
Starving man in Pahokee, FL in 1990 less than an hour away from Trump and the millionaires on the right in Palm Beach

1974 - millionaires eating lobster in Palm Beach, FL

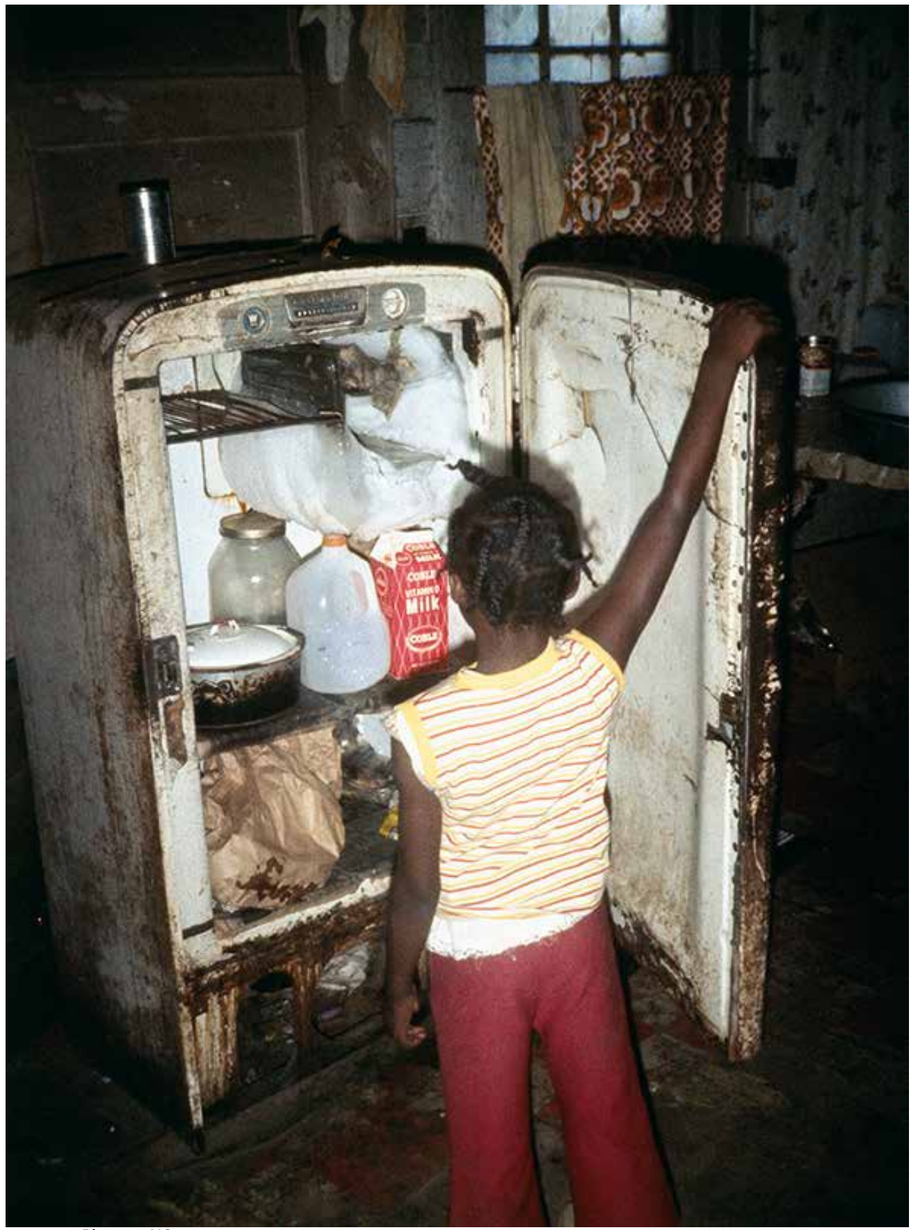
1974 - Thanksgiving in Daytona, FL

1984 - private party with B.B. King hired to play in Houston

USA
1996



1996 - rural Selma, AL



1975 - Pireway, NC

USA
1975

Sweet dirt: The taste of hunger in Black America

"I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream."
Langston Hughes, from "Let America Be America Again"

The hunger we indirectly inflict on our outcasts reinforces our racist view of them. Over the years—and not least today—I found whites increasingly blaming the victims, rather than federal policy, for their lethargy.

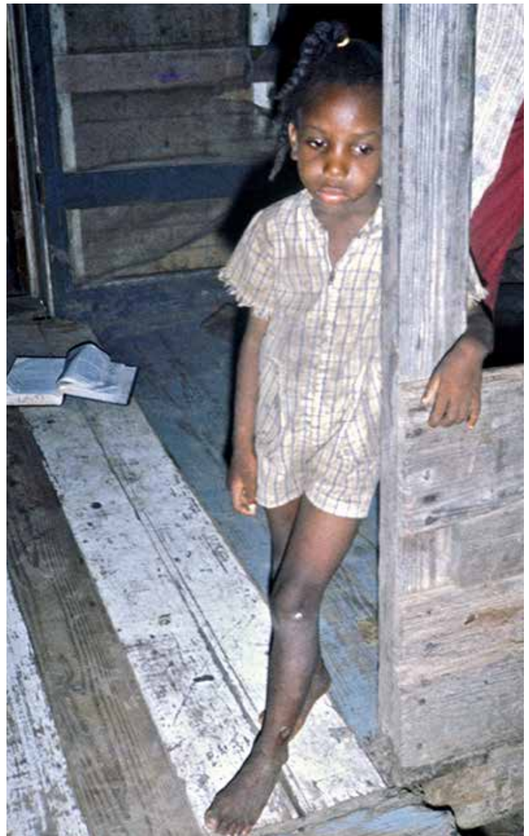
The deaths marked by tombstones only represented the tip of the iceberg. A poor diet leaves people listless and susceptible to numerous diseases, which is one reason why life expectancy for blacks is seven years shorter than for whites (as seen again under Covid–19 conditions).

Historically, numerous black children have, due to hunger, suffered irreversible brain damage, which also causes laziness, apathy, alienation, and the inability to work. I found it difficult to get close to these sullen, withdrawn children—they were incredibly fearful of strangers. Again and again, while staying in run-down shacks, I ate cornbread, grits, and baked beans with lumps of fat.

In better-off homes, I was served more traditional "soul food," like pig knuckles, hog maw, chitterlings, pigs' ears, feet, and tails, as well as similar fat crumbs from the white man's table. Hundreds of thousands got less than the 3.5 pounds of bacon and pork a field hand received each week under chattel slavery.

I found the worst hunger on remote backroads and among the urban elderly. A hungry dog is a sign there are hungry people nearby. In winter, when hunger was at its worst, I saw blacks digging up roots in white-owned fields. Many black women in the South eat dirt. When I first visited, nearly 50% of black women in Alabama, Mississippi, and North Carolina ate clay. According to the New York Times, it was still happening in 2000. This woman, exhausted from anemia, led me to a slope where she dug for the "food" she shared with her son.

"There is something about poverty that smells like death. Dead dreams dropping off the heart like leaves in a dry season."
-Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

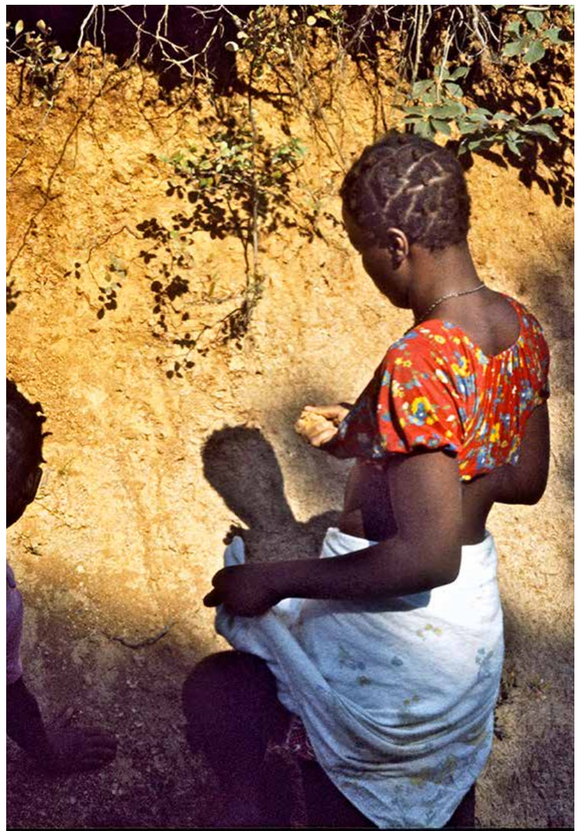


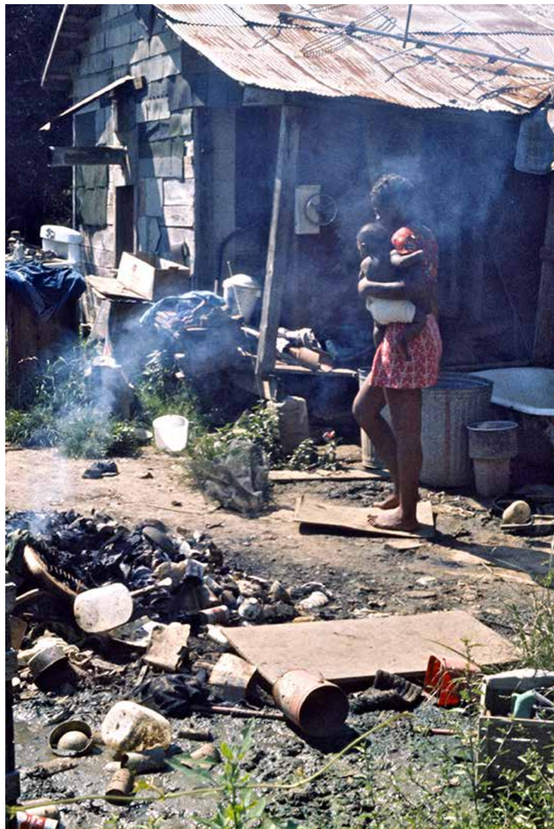
Left 1975 - rural Meridian, MS - top 1975 - anywhere

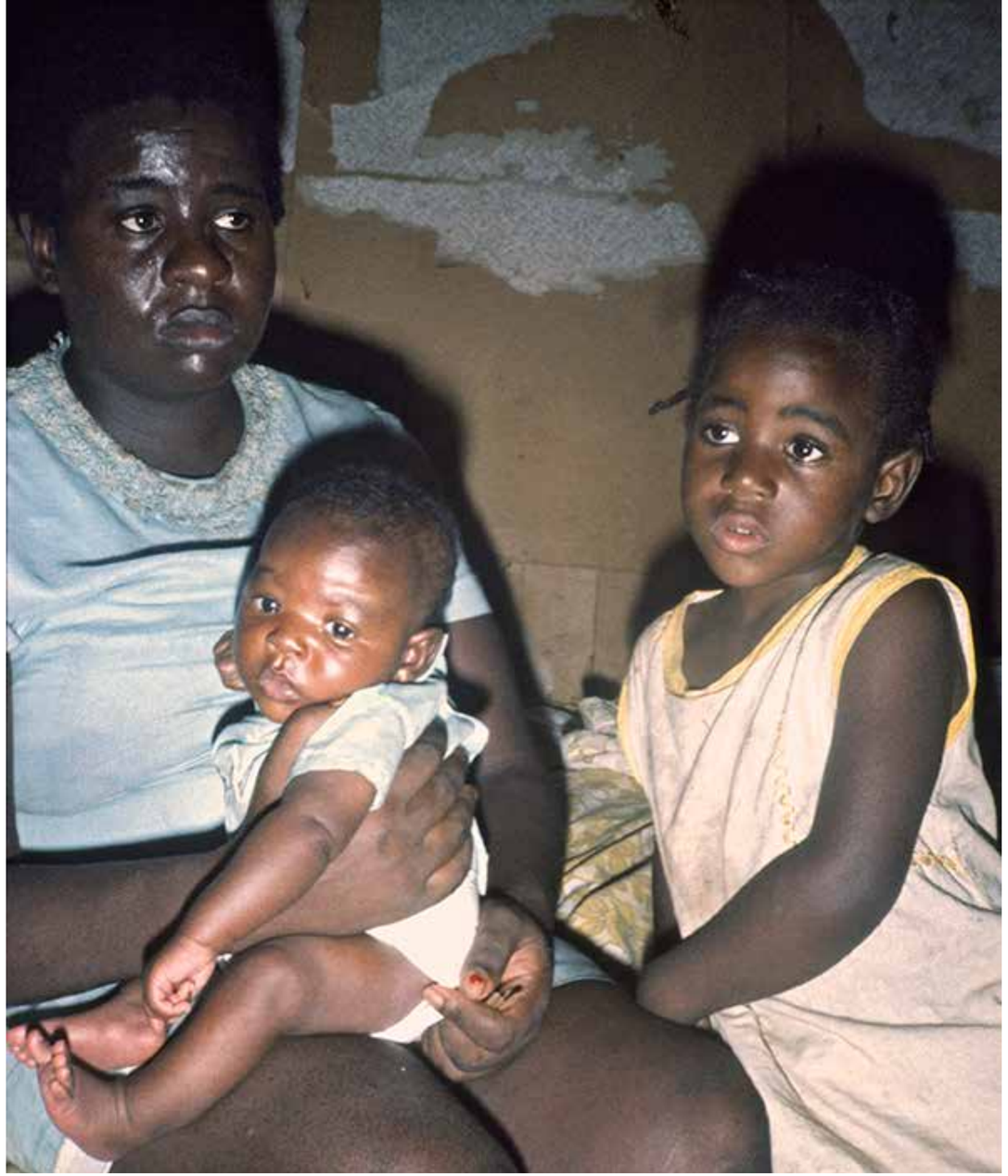
Interview with dirt eater on the right

- Do you ever eat dirt?
- Sometimes...
- Does it taste good?
- Yes. (Surprised) *Have you never eaten it?*
- No, but I would like to try. What kind is it, clay? Red clay?
- Yes, it is really red....
- What do you call it?
- We call it sweet dirt...
- I thought it was called Mississippi mud. That's what they call it up north. (Many blacks in the North I found out had it mailed by family in the South).
- Do you ever eat laundry starch?
- Sometimes.
- Who else eats dirt around here?
- My mother and my aunt over there. Everybody, I think.

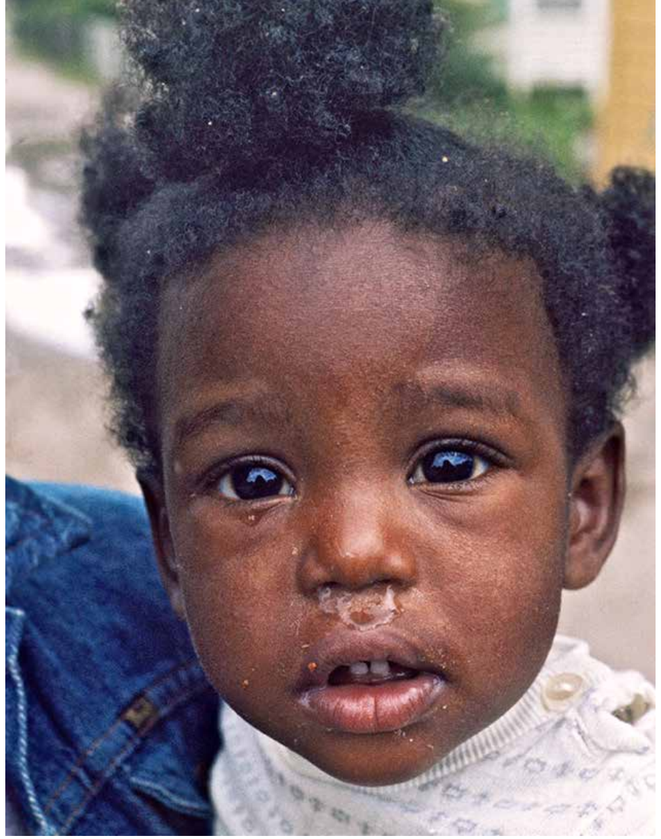
1975 - rural Meridian, MS Listen to her interview about dirt eating



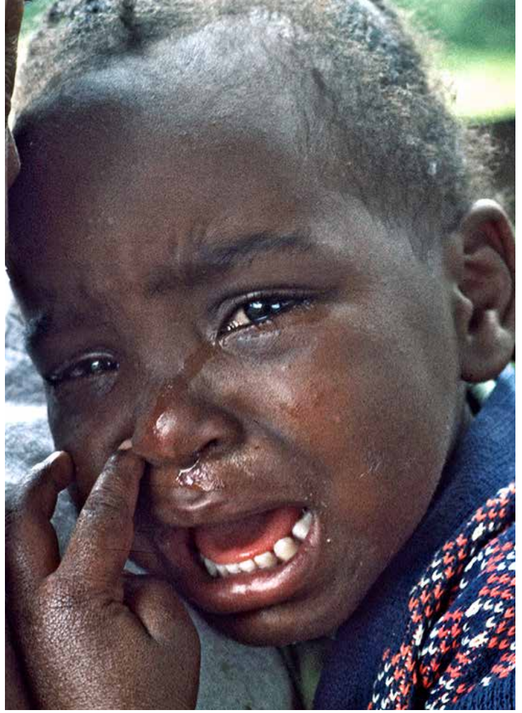




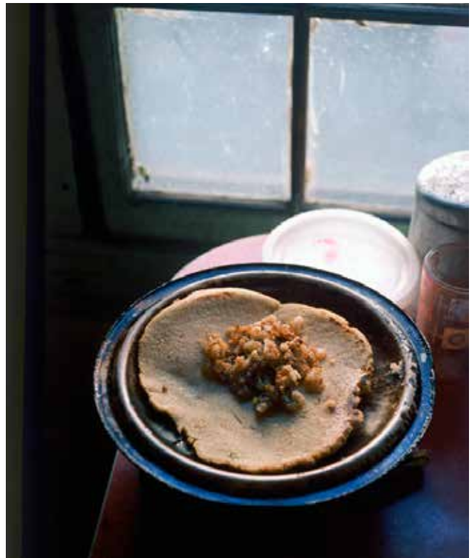
1975 - Philadelphia, MS

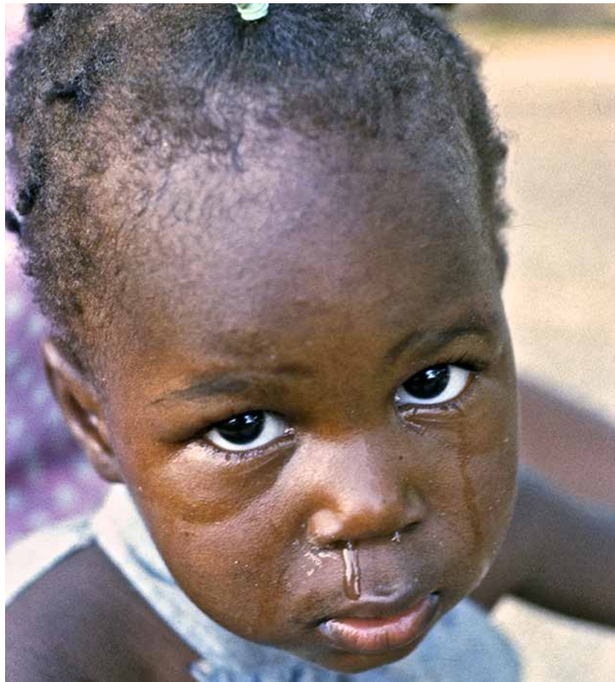


1973 - rural Wallace, NC and below 1974 - Greenville, NC



1974 - rural Morehead City, NC and below 1973 - Vanceboro, NC





The Silent Hunger of the Soul: Apathy in the Face of Poverty

"In the South, the dead are never dead. They are part of your blood, your bone, your breath." - Alice Walker, "Meridian"

"Lead poisoning is an environmental disaster that has poisoned and killed countless black children." - Alice Walker

The personal encounter with the constant whining, restlessness, and snotty noses of children who cry incessantly because they're hungry seems almost a relief—is infinitely preferable to the empty eyes and dead silence of children whom hunger has made so apathetic they're no longer able to cry. Are we ourselves able to cry? When I cooled off in the endless shopping malls with their numbing muzak, I almost cried over the contrast to the extreme poverty I'd just seen. Over how easily and blithely through such escapes we let that kind of hunger be chiseled into the experience of blacks throughout American history.
I wasn't born into this oppression. But how would witnessing what happens to a people's soul affect me over the course of my life? For example, what is happening right now in Gaza and Sudan? To see mothers lay their children in graves?Or to see mothers die at a brutal rate (13,600 black women die annually in childbirth)? Only 3,481 would die if they had access to white healthcare—fewer than 2,000 if they had European healthcare. How can Americans spend billions annually on designing new car models while condemning their children to rank only 15th lowest in child mortality (17,686 babies died unnecessarily in 1977)?

Does being bombarded by ads for cars and other goods make us blind to human values and the suffering around us? What does it say about our priorities that the car graveyard in the background is fenced in but not the human cemetery in the foreground?

Most likely it reflects the priorities that allowed General Motors to destroy the streetcars in American cities in 1936 so that GM could sell more cars. Today, without public transportation, air pollution from cars is attributed to upwards of 100,000 deaths annually in the U.S. Black children are particularly vulnerable to this form of environmental racism.
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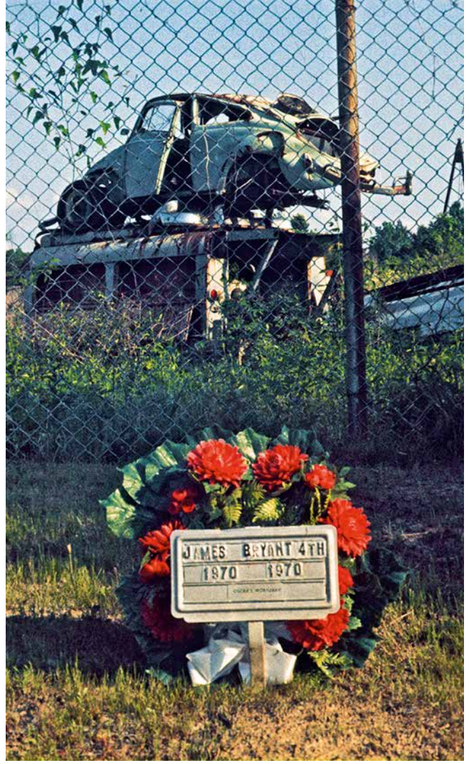
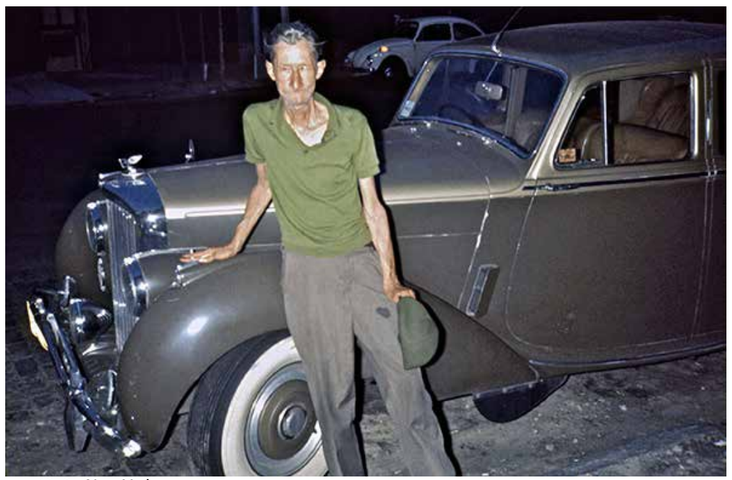
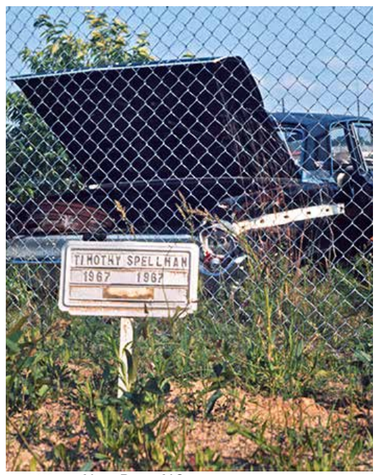


1974 - New Bern, NC

1975 - Philadelphia, MS

1974 - rural Eastern NC


1973 - New York



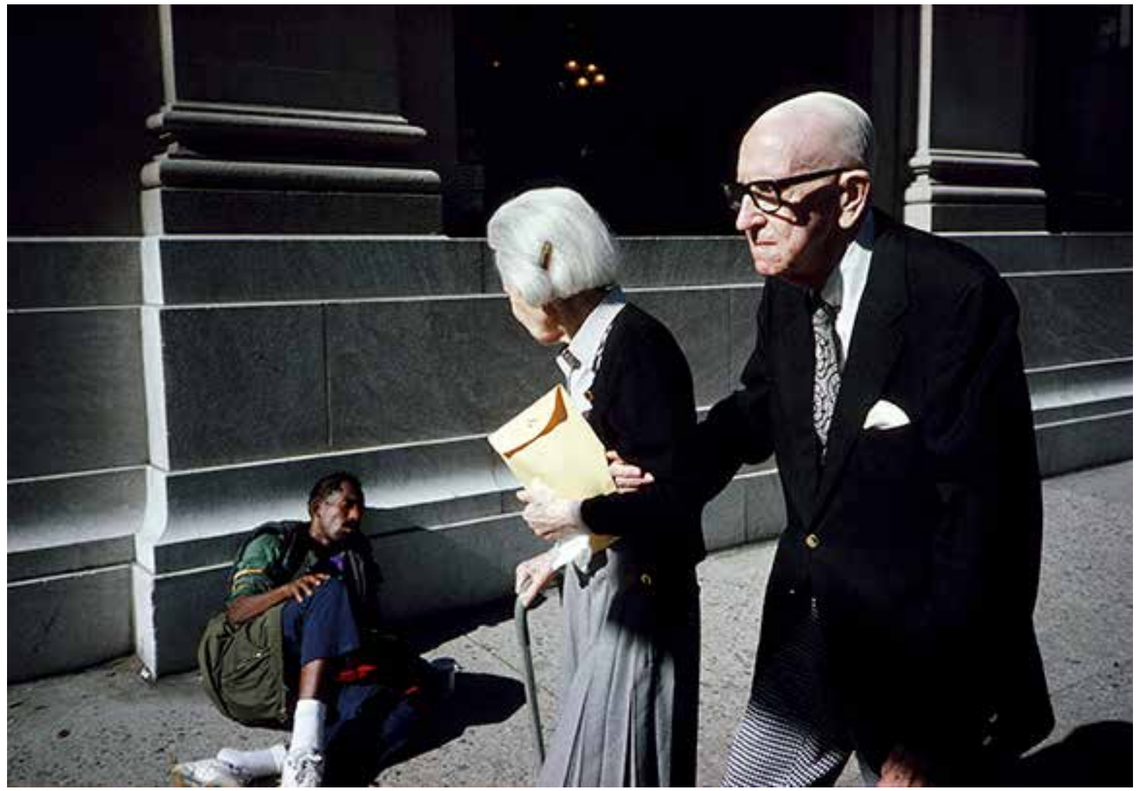
1974 - New Bern, NC

The myths of meritocracy behind systemic exploitation

"I learned that racism, like most systems of oppression, isn't about bad people doing terrible things to people who are different from them but instead is a way of maintaining power for certain groups at the expense of others." - Alicia Garza, The Purpose of Power

The ideological blinding that insists people "row their own boats" is upheld through persistent appeals to our selfishness and greediness. The laws of our system, invisible for most people, manipulate us with incessant Horatio Alger propaganda, with stories about Rockefeller and "the self-made man"—lessons in the attainability of success. The enormous exploitation and suffering necessary to create, for instance, a Jeff Bezos and his time-clock slaves is left out.

The road to success is portrayed as a road with obstacles, which a determined man with the necessary qualities can overcome. The reward is waiting in the distance. The road is lonesome and to achieve success one must adopt wolf-like qualities: eat or be eaten. One can only succeed at the cost of the failure of others.

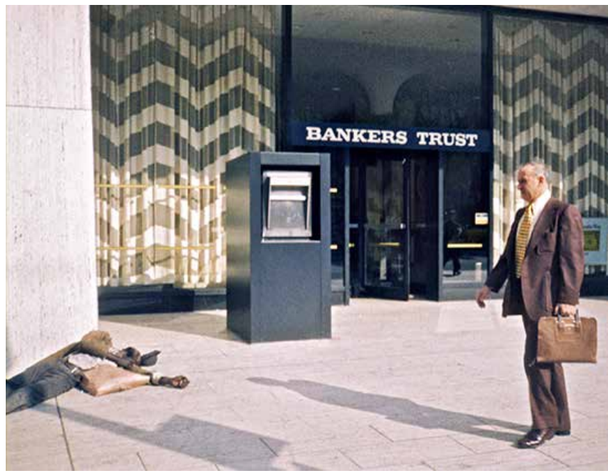


1991 - New York

1991 - Astor Place, New York

1974 - NYC

1973 - NYC. A Rolls-Royce with a black chauffeur



1974 - 42nd St, NYC

2009 - Harlem, NY - during Financial Crisis

My Visionary Photo of a Crisis Foretold

"Legalized discrimination — where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions or the police force or the fire department — meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations. That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between blacks and whites, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persist in so many of today's urban and rural communities." Obama

"America's obsession with wealth is destroying the nation's soul. We are becoming increasingly divided between the rich and the poor, and this is leading to violence, inequality, and despair." – Alice Walker

Wealth Gap Grows Between Whites and Minorities

The median wealth of white households is 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of newly available government data from 2009.

These lopsided wealth ratios are the largest since the government began publishing such data a quarter century ago and roughly twice the size of the ratios that had prevailed between these three groups for the two decades prior to the Great Recession that ended in 2009.

20-to-1

The median wealth of white households is 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households, according to an analysis of newly available government data from 2009.

2011 - Pew Research Center

As a penniless vagabond, I was constantly outraged by the inequality in America, but it was difficult to photograph the dynamics that created the many victims I saw on the streets. Still, I was sometimes quite visionary: This bank, E. F. Hutton & Co., engaged in money laundering for the mafia, lost millions on Black Monday, and almost caused global capitalism to crash in 1987. Then it merged with Lehman Brothers and kicked off the financial crisis in 2008, almost succeeding, once again, in overthrowing global capitalism. Years of "Reaganomic" deregulation combined with risky subprime loans, many given to the struggling black middle class, forced millions out of their homes. I now saw blacks in food lines, like these in Harlem, everywhere. After the crisis the average white became twenty times as wealthy as the average black. When I first arrived in 1970, whites were only six times as rich.

1974 - Miami Beach, FL and right 1974 - New Orleans
Opposite page 1971 - NY - This bank, E. F. Hutton & Co. merged with Lehman Brothers and triggered the financial crisis.

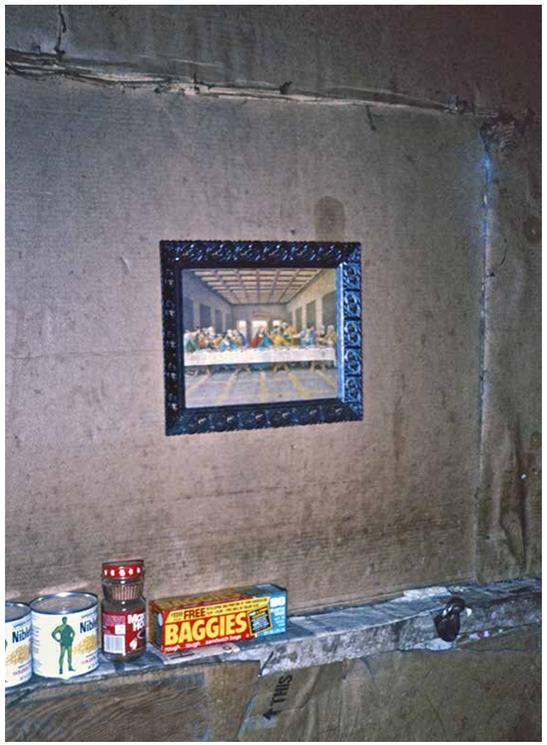
1975 - San Francisco

1974 - anywhere

1973 - Charleston, SC

1974 - NYC - You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly

1975 - Bullock County, AL



1975 - Union Springs, AL

1978 - Waynesboro, GA

1974 - anywhere in the United States

1973 - 5th Ave, NYC

Healthcare Inequality and the Wolf hilosophy

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." - Martin Luther King

"The US is the wealthiest country in the world, yet we have the worst health outcomes out of any high-income country, and in part that's because our persistent racial health inequities are so profound." — Uché Blackstock, A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine

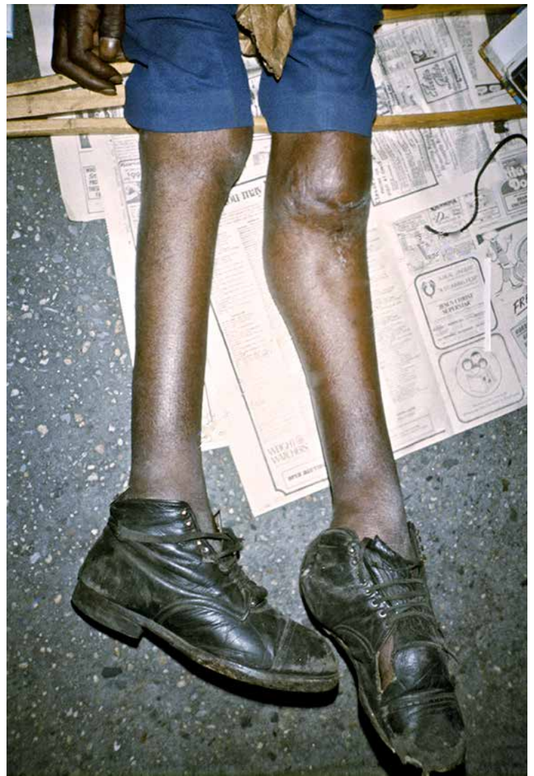
It's easy to see how this wolf philosophy manifests itself. Gigantic money-palaces in the middle of black slums comprised just one of the more hideous aspects of this philosophy's pathological nature. Today, money is only located in white areas, often surrounded by an army of homeless blacks whose numbers I didn't see in the '70s. In ghettos infested with rats, filth and violence, blacks must either "go online or downtown" to banks built like marble castles with huge gold-trimmed vaults. Yes, there's plenty of money in the banks, held by insurance companies, and among those who own them. But why then, I ask—with the morality of the street and the vagabond—is there no money for my crippled friend Lee, who must sit in the street every day and beg for pennies? Lee told me that he'd studied law at university in his youth but had to quit when he got polio. He still studies and I brought several books for him on the topic that most interested him, namely business law, which he still believed would be a way of pulling himself up by his bootstraps.

Lee wasn't only a victim of his own pocket philosophy, but a caricature of the social disease that determines that American doctors will make so much money the poor can't afford them. While Canada and other rich countries have free health insurance, American doctors operate like businessmen, with the result that the health of the poor is at Third World levels and thousands die from causes that wouldn't be fatal in Europe. Before Obamacare, 50 million people couldn't afford health insurance at all. Why should the middle class pay less than 4% of their income on healthcare while the poor pay more than 15% (for dilatory third- and fourth-class care)? The result is that the most affluent white Americans are as healthy as the Danes, but the health of the (black) poor is comparable to that of populations in underdeveloped nations. And it would look even worse if it weren't for doctors from developing countries—virtually all in the doctors in ghettos are from developing countries because white Americans won't serve them. Only 5% of U.S. doctors are African American, but half of those also avoid patients in the ghettos. And none make house calls.

In the Norfolk ghetto, I spent a whole day comforting a lonely, grief-stricken man whose wife had died the night before because he couldn't get her to a doctor, and I couldn't help being overwhelmed by guilt. I recalled the many mornings in my childhood when I asked to see a doctor for my "stomachache" because I hadn't done my homework. Few can afford to cry wolf, as I had, in the midst of a wolf society, where healthcare for profit is a deadly business indeed: 24,000 blacks die annually from lack of "white medical care"; 39,500 American women a year die in childbirth for lack of "Scandinavian health care," and the American man's life expectancy ranks only 35th among U.N. member nations.
Since Americans pay almost twice as much for their privatized health care as Europeans and also have to pay more than the price of a house for just four years of university, you understand why most can no longer afford or have time for our six-week paid vacations. They don't grasp that precisely because the Danes pay twice as much in tax, we have so much money left over, after all bills are paid, that even workers can afford to travel the globe. (I use Denmark as an example since so did Bernie Sanders when he ran for president in 2020).

Above 1971 - New York, NY

Below my friend Lee outside the Manufacturers Trust vault on 510 Fifth Avenue, NYC.
I later found out that now famous Vivian Maier had also photographed him there 20 years before.



1975 - Waynesboro, GA - Julia Williams - See interview with her below

1975 - Waynesboro, GA

Apathy: The silent killer of poverty

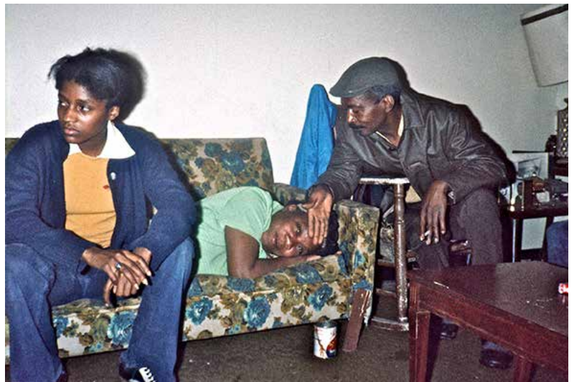
"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." - Maya Angelou

"The deadliest enemy of the human spirit is despair." - Cornel West

The death statistics only show the surface. Willie Williams sits sat here hunched up all day in an armchair, staring blankly at the two men who'd once given him so much hope: Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. His wife, Julia, is lying in bed, sick and debilitated from hunger.

She can't afford special diabetic food as they only receive $72 a month. They're alone, forgotten by society in a world of emptiness only interrupted by the cheerless dripping of rain through the ceiling.

The most pernicious of poverty's diseases is, without a doubt, apathy, the state of mind into which millions of people are thrown when they realize they can't hold their own in a world of the upward-climbing optimism of the wolf philosophy—and simply give up the struggle.

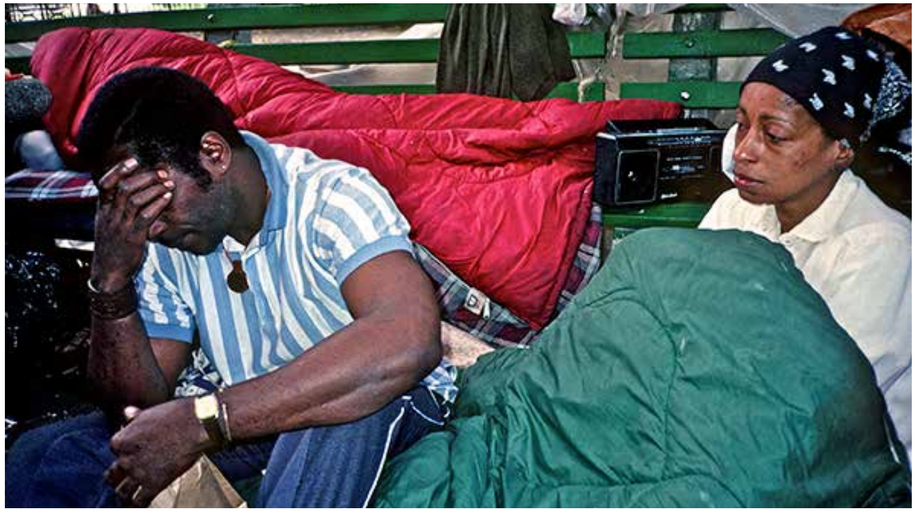


1974 - Washington, NC

1975 - Waynesboro, GA – Willie Williams - See video here

Interview with Julie Williams

1998 - NYC - Inequality exploded unchecked after the Reagan years

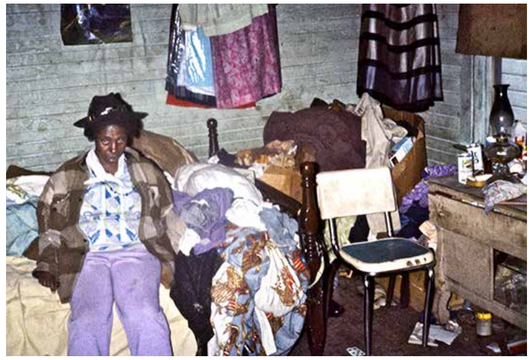


1991 - NYC - Homeless couple on The Lower East Side

The destruction of love and trust

"If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it." – Zora Neale Hurston

The needy in the United States are a minority and see affluence everywhere they look. As a result, the solidarity and pride often characterizing rural communities in poor countries are absent; poverty becomes crueler and much more psychologically destructive here than anywhere else in the world.
In America you're constantly told that it's your own fault if you're poor. Thus you fall into violent self-hatred, a morbid state I find unequalled anywhere else in the world. This state of mind destroys societal love, the invisible threads of mutual interdependence and trust that bind people in a healthy society. The destruction of love sows increasing distrust and fear. Although fear seems to direct everyone in such a society, first and foremost it paralyzes the poor.

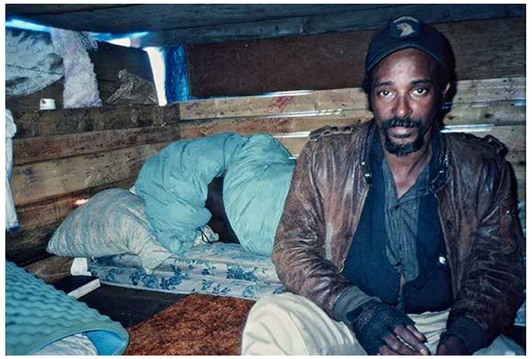


1974 - Washington, NC

1975 - Bullock County, AL

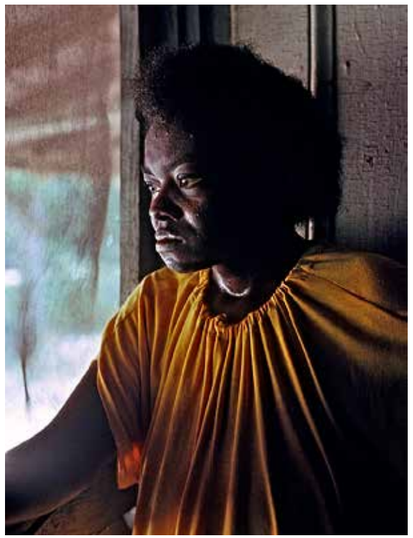
1978 - Zebulon, NC

1995 - NYC



1990 - New York, NY - Below 1974 - Tarboro, NC

1996 - rural Houma, LA



1995 - Bullock County, AL

White supremacy and the institutionalization of fear

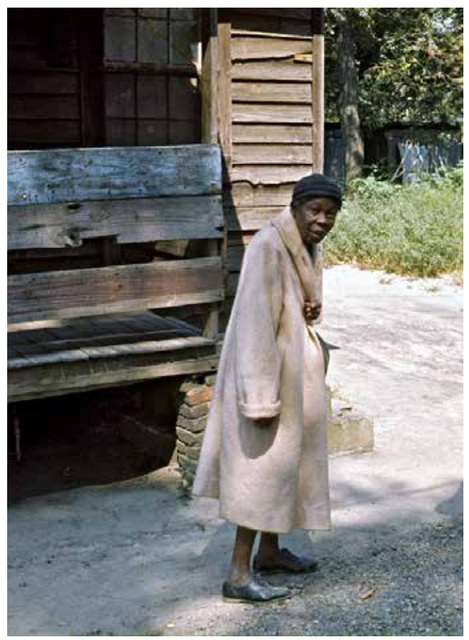
"White supremacy is not just a social arrangement; it is a death-dealing machine." – Cornel West

One of the things I find most difficult getting used to in America is this ubiquitous fear—and its resulting reactions. Not only the primitive fear of other people but more frighteningly the institutionalized fear of old age, sickness, and insecurity, which seems to darken the golden years of so many people and leads them to think and act in ways that seem totally irrational and self-defeating when, like me, you've been shaped by "cradle-to-grave" welfare security. A desire to hold onto white supremacy is one of the resulting distress patterns among the victims of such fear. This in turn made blacks, such as this woman, who initially fled from me, fear whites.

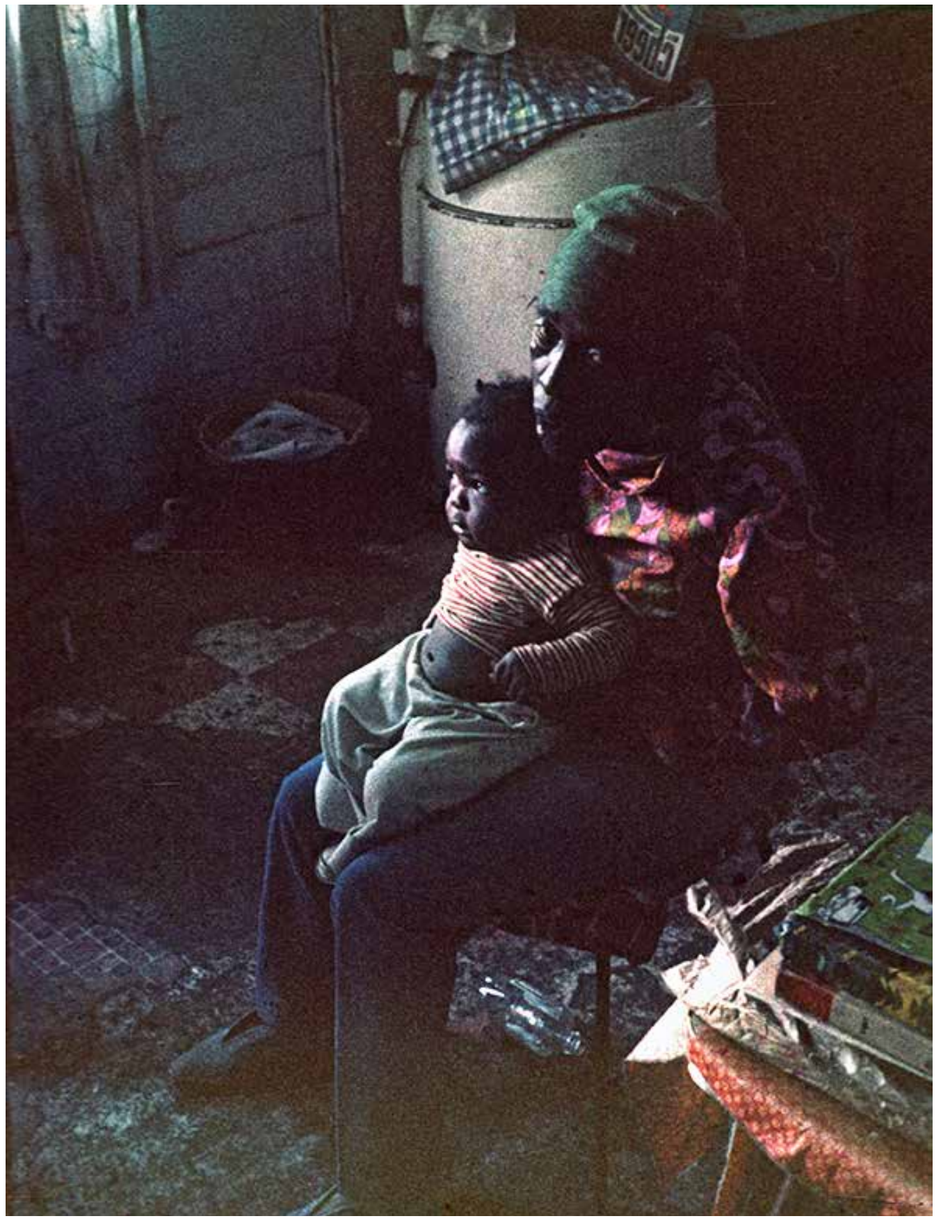
- Are you scared of whites around here?
- Man, see, I don't mess with whites no kind of way.
- What's wrong with the whites?
- Them whites, they mess you up, man. They make you lose your home, make you lose your man, make you lose your husband if you got one. They make you do everything that ain't right ... I am talking about these around here... What is you?
- I'm not southern white...

I always felt that blacks exaggerated a bit when they told me such things. I've always had a rather naïve faith in the goodness of people, probably because I haven't grown up in poverty and insecurity. Without this faith I couldn't have traveled the way I did since my faith usually encouraged the good sides of people. Consequently, I got along well with southern whites, whom I'm more fond of because of their warmth and honesty, than the more liberal but colder and less direct whites in the North.

Interview with the scared woman on the right



1995 - Bullock County, AL



1974 - Elizabethtown, NC

Mary at night in her shack on the forest backroads in Bullock County, 1975

Mary dressed up for church in 1975

The Samaritan Woman's Well: An American Romeo and Juliet

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

The bitter truth, however, dawned on me when, on the humid stifling backroads of Alabama, I came to Mary and her son, John, to get a glass of water. Without indoor plumbing, we ended up—in more ways than one—sharing water at the Samaritan woman's well. Mary and I romanticized our relationship in these harsh surroundings, but her trust in people around her wasn't like mine: She had three pistols and a shotgun under the bed. These turned out to be some of the happiest days of my life, and to this day we still nurture strong feelings for each other. When I went away briefly to see a Ku Klux Klan meeting in Kentucky, Mary gave me a silver cross as protection. As it turned out, Mary needed the protection more than I did. One night, for no reason other than her having a white man living with her, three whites threw a firebomb into her kitchen. The entire house went up in flames. She managed to get her son out, but her brother, who was asleep, perished in the fire.

The tragedy threw me into my recurring dilemma: Can I, as an outsider, have fully human relationships with those deemed pariahs? Those who want to maintain a caste system will always condemn such relationships. Crippling taboo systems can therefore be broken down only if on a personal level we try to be fully human to everyone—with the risk this entails for deeper feelings and infatuation.

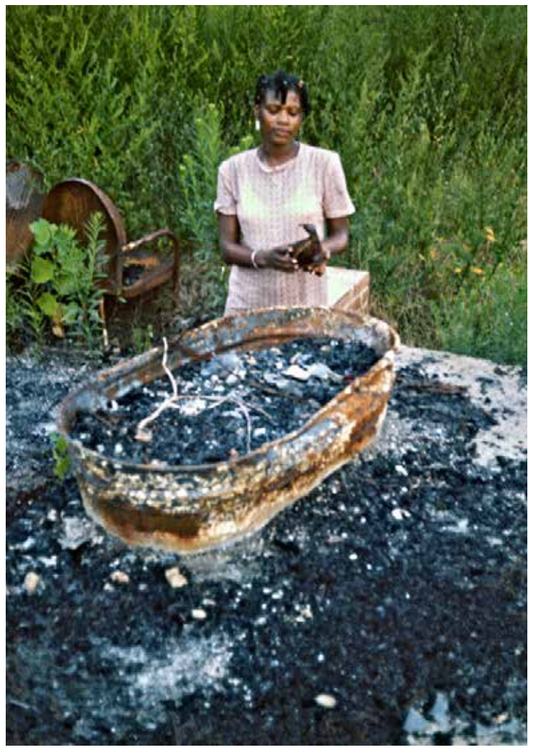
But ignoring each other's background can also, as in Romeo and Juliet, imply danger for oneself and others—danger or, if it's conscious, fear, which must never limit us in our human involvement, in the love of our neighbor as of ourselves.

Americans often blame me for Mary's tragedy. In guilt over an unmentioned apartheid line in their hearts and minds actually caused our Shakespearean tragedy. Similarly, we Europeans condemn Americans for this peculiar gut resistance to intimate black-white relationships, while we forget our own primitive resistance to relationships with Muslim immigrants.

Everywhere in the world, the minds of both oppressor and the oppressed are devoured with obscure obsessive objections toward intermarriage and intimate interrelationships. But for the outsider of a particular oppression, it's easy to see that neither the oppressor nor the oppressed is free!

My departure from Mary and John - See video here

Mary did not have the same trust in people as I did

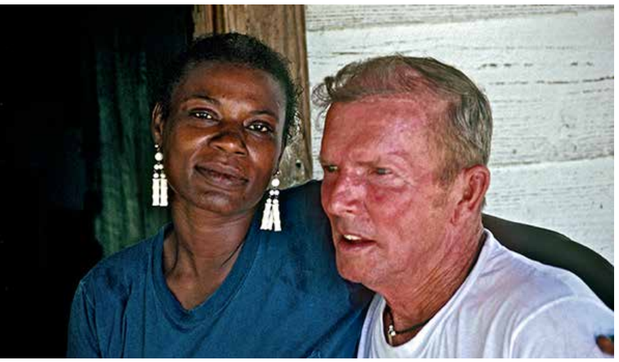


Mary at her house after the firebombing, which she talks about here 3 months after

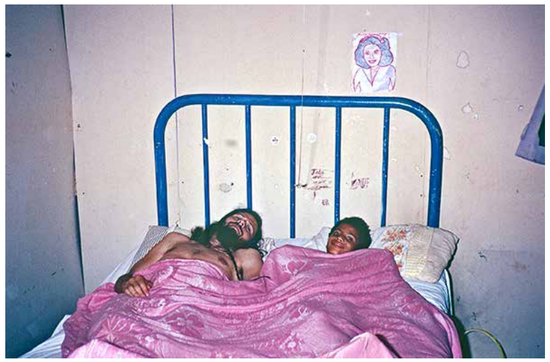
The story as it appears in the slide-show with music and interview about the fire three months after the attack

Can There Be “Free Love” Under Unfree Conditions?

Thoughts on my lifelong relationship with Mary.



Mary and her new“boyfriend” from Florida 1984



10-year-old John and I always shared the bed in the old shack. 1975

Mary with her new shack and still untilled piece of land in 1978 - I am soaking wet picking peas with Mary in 1986.

Mary and her friend Bertha with her boyfriend 1984

The violent veteran always threatened with his guns. 1978

“I’m not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don’t at all care to be owned. Even by you” -- Nella Larsen i “Quicksand” on her relationship to a white Danish man

In the years after Mary’s tragedy, my audiences blamed me almost daily for having caused it: “You shouldn’t have exposed a poor black woman to that kind of danger with your irresponsible (sexual) exploitation.” I wonder why Americans always imagine sex when they see images of a naked woman rather than the intimacy I tried to convey with my pictures. In Mary’s case, she was less a “naked” woman than a bikini-clad woman on the beach, and yet religious universities like Baylor in Texas forced me to remove Mary’s slide before lecturing. The obsession with sex makes Americans blind to the deeper oppression Mary was subjected to. The truth is that even if Mary and I had wanted to have sex her circumstances made it virtually impossible. As a vagabond, I always shared the bed of her 7-year-old son, John, in their tiny bedroom, which accommodated two single beds. And I had to be out of the shack before 5 a.m., which is the reason I often preferred to sleep with a neighbor.

Why did I have to leave? Thanks to the good old nighttime integration between the white master and his favorite slave mistress, which began during slavery. “Nighttime integration and daytime segregation make this a very mixed-up place,” Rosa Parks wrote when she rebelled against both during her famous Montgomery bus boycott a few miles from Mary’s residence. In return for sex, white landowners would offer financial support to single black women, who became dependent on it to survive. Mary’s sugar daddy, Harry, would always show up around at 5 a.m., telling “his hysterical jealous wife” as Mary called her, that he was doing field work. She always talked warmly of him, and for moral reasons (as well as to avoid losing their beneficial arrangement), having sex with me at the same time was unthinkable. When I came back with my book describing the firebombing in 1978, Mary was heartbroken because Harry, who’d bought her a large piece of land with a bigger shack after the fire, had just been killed. I would spend the next 23 years with her in that romantic two-room shack without much romance between us—Mary, who was still attractive, immediately found a new white man to support her. He was a violent traumatized Vietnam veteran, but he let me stay in the other room. They were grateful for my arrival because they hadn’t spoken to each other in weeks, and I helped mediate between them. When I came back in 1982, she’d fled because he’d tried to kill her with one of the very guns I’d photographed him shooting with.

The next one was an old “redneck” from Florida who, like the other two, was deeply racist. He let me stay there and photograph all the affection Mary bestowed on him when he was around. Through Mary I met a whole network of rural black women practicing “nighttime integration.” They even came in the daytime to practice it in our shack. I photographed Mary’s friend Bertha after she became pregnant with her sugar daddy’s baby. All the local blacks knew about “nighttime integration,” and I never understood why it didn’t seem to bother them. Nor did I understand why, just like Mary, they kept voting for George Wallace, a racist who’d once blocked their door to higher education with his policy of “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever.”

This overt exploitation seemed to end for Mary in the ’80s. Nonetheless, we still didn’t feel free in our relationship—this despite the fact that our mutual affection had grown as we’d gotten older. She’d always been a fieldworker, picking cotton as a child instead of going to school, but without a sugar daddy’s income, she had to work extra hard. I did my best to help, so some days I’d be standing on stage in front of a thousand guilt-ridden students. The next day, guilt-ridden myself, I’d pick a thousand baskets of beans and peas with Mary—she affectionately referred to our relationship as “pea-ing together.” With the adulation I got from my students came the risk of feeling like I could walk on water. So I balanced that delusion with walking in the mud beside those whose stories I was telling—sometimes, as with Mary, water-soaked in the stifling August heat.

I felt the historic master-slave relationship revived when the white landowner came around at 5 a.m. and dumped us in a remote field where we worked in the hot sun until quitting time. In the evening we grew our own food on the “40 acres (minus 38) and a mule” (I was the mule plowing her two acres) that she’d received in “reparations” from her deceased white lover. “You’re practicing Danish slavery,” I told her. Unlike slaves in the US,

the slaves in the Danish Virgin Island and other Caribbean islands were allowed to grow their own food on small plots of land while slaving for the master during the day. That way their personal initiative and enterprising skills weren’t broken, in contrast to what I still saw a century later here in the Black Belt. In any event, when the moon was finally rising romantically over the fields, we were so exhausted we literally fainted on the bed—our backs and sex drive equally broken. In the winter the reason for our celibacy was different. On each lecture tour, I’d always make

Mary in a relaxing moment after a hard day's work in 1988

John with pregnant Debra the year before she was murdered. 1990

"Two acres and a (Danish) mule" in 1984

Mary always ready with her guns to protect us. 1994

time to see Mary and other friends in the South. Since Mary had no telephone, I'd call Eula, an old woman nearby, to send her grandchildren over to announce my arrival. Mary would spend the day cooking my favorite soul food: pig tails, turnip greens, hog maws, etc. After this fantastic meal, we'd drive all over the woods to visit old friends (in years past, I'd bicycled on those around and photographed them in their shacks). Since many of these shacks had burned down, usually in stove fires, only Mary knew where my friends had gone on the endless dirt roads cutting through the dark woods. One of those I'd photographed in my youth was Mary's 98-year-old grandfather (page 99). Mary told me he shot his wife (on the left) and died of grief a short time later. More than anyone else, Mary has been responsible for updating my photographic record of the people living in remote shacks. With her at my side, people didn't fear or distrust me as a white man—issues I'd struggled to overcome in my vagabond years. But now that we were old friends, they always expected me to bring cases of beer. Night after night we'd drink until it was so late I'd be unable to drive home, and we'd pass out wherever we were in the woods. I loved these relaxing nights with Mary, who, with her charm and lively personality, could open doors everywhere—except to any sex life between us. When we finally tried to have a romantic night in her shack, there was so much tension and violence in the neighborhood, with drunken revelers from a nearby club driving into our yard to smoke dope or have sex in their cars, that she sat behind the curtains for hours with her shotgun. The firebombing, which had occurred in our innocent youth, left deep scars in both of us.

The person she feared most, as it turned out, was her own son, John. John had been conceived in violence: He was the son of a white man who'd raped Mary when she was 16. She was constantly calling me to help get him out of jail, usually for burglary, theft, or possession of a firearm or crack. She had the naïve belief that I, as a white man, had the authority to make a difference. Being biracial, John suffered from a lifelong identity crisis as well as low self-esteem. He loved me from childhood as the father he'd never had, but violence followed him everywhere he went. He'd even stolen his mother's guns and expensive gifts she'd gotten from white lovers, which he pawned for crack money. He also left pregnant women all over Alabama, forcing us to drive around the state comforting them while Mary futilely attempted to keep up with a growing number of grandchildren. Debra, whom I photographed pregnant in our shack, was one of his sweetest girlfriends. A year later, when I asked where she was, Mary said casually, "Oh, Debra, she went into town to buy milk for the baby but was shot and killed when she left the store." I think it was the fear of violence that made Mary avoid black boyfriends. There was one exception, which I only found out about by accident. After a couple of days with her in February 1996, I asked her about her constant sniffling. She explained that she'd gotten the flu out in a frozen swamp. "What were you doing there?" I asked. Almost as a side remark, she said that someone had tried to murder her on New Year's Eve. Fifty years old at this point, she'd given up on finding another white boyfriend, so for the first time in her life, she tried a black boyfriend, a man who'd been released after years in prison. She realized he was dangerously violent and tried to break up with him. He suddenly forced her into his car at gunpoint and drove her into the swamps. He put the gun to her temple, but she'd been drinking a Coke and used the bottle to crack his skull. She fled through the icy swamps a whole night before finding a shack. Well, that's probably the Southern way to get the flu, I thought, but I wondered why she didn't tell me about this terrifying incident until I asked the right question.

I'd long ago become used to the violence around her, but the many European travelers I brought with me to meet Mary, whom they always adored, were often shocked. When multimillionaire Anita Roddick traveled with me in 1994, she immediately bonded with Mary and wanted to employ her in some idealistic business project she planned to set up for poor blacks in the Black Belt. We'd been out drinking and playing pool, and I'd told Anita that she could just have my bed in the

From the TV-movie "Jacob Holdt in America" in 1991. The camera people fell through Mary's floor

Mary 47 years old in 1994

Mary showing Anita Roddick the hats and quilts she makes 1994

van while I slept in Mary's bed. Anita, however, had been frightened by all the violence she'd experienced on this, the first evening of our tour. Mary's drunk cousin, for example, went around shooting out all the lamps we passed. Anita was terrified about sleeping alone in the woods and afraid that Mary's shack would be firebombed again. Her Body Shop Company had insisted on following behind us with some armed bodyguards, but both she and I had refused, since the idea was to travel on my "vagabond terms." As a result, I was faced on our very first night with a choice I'd never had to make before. Should I sleep with one of the richest women in the world or with one of the poorest? A multimillionaire or a farmworker? I knew that if I slept with Anita, I risked hurting Mary's feelings by choosing to sleep with a white woman. If I slept with Mary, I risked losing the terrified Anita for the rest of the trip. It wasn't an easy situation, so we dragged it out, playing pool and drinking more beer. Around four in the morning I solved my dilemma by telling Mary a white lie about how we were on such a tight schedule we had to leave the same night to meet someone in Mississippi the next day. Needless to say I was way too drunk to drive, but I managed on the deserted backroads to drive a mile into the forest, where I shared my "Body Shop" with Anita (no hurt feelings on either side). Afterwards Anita sent Mary a big check, but the violence and despair Anita met with everywhere convinced her to give up her idealistic project in the same way that other investors had always ghettoized and broken the initiative of the most powerless people in the Black Belt.

The fear of violence can be overwhelming. In August 1990 I left Denmark for New York, and as usual criminals broke into my van on the Lower East Side (on the first night). The next evening, while I was cleaning up broken glass, I heard shots. I looked out of the van and saw two Puerto Ricans running. They both fell. Out of habit I grabbed my camera and sprinted over to them, but when I began taking pictures, I realized I was staring into the eyes of two dying people. I began to shake all over. In a panic I ran up to the lesbians I'd lived with for many years in a loft on Ave D. Still shaking, I told Martha what had happened. My second shock came when she laughed and said, "Well, Jacob, welcome back to America. Yesterday, when I stood looking out the kitchen window at a black woman waiting for the bus on Eighth Street, she suddenly sank to the ground, dead. Hit by stray bullets." I thought about her laughter. How else could these sensitive female poets, who made movies about the violence done to women, deal with the horrors of their environment? I'd planned to photograph the crack and crime epidemic in their neighborhood, while Bush was on a shooting spree of his own in Iraq, but I was so terrified I jumped into my van the same night and drove the 1000 miles straight down to the relative peace of Mary's shack. When I was with Mary, I was never afraid of the violence in the local club, where in the best moments we loved to do the latest Da' Train chain dances. In the worst moments, I photographed black men "hitting on" their women (see the photo of one of Mary's friends on page 291). I loved that funky joint in the middle of Alabama's woods. Unfortunately, one of the regulars burned it down, along with my American Pictures posters on the walls, after getting into a fight.

But the scariest violence didn't come from people. In 2011, when Mary was 65 years old, I was coming from a lecture in Mississippi. In fact, it was more of an attempt to empower the audience—almost all women—of historically black Tougaloo College. "Where are the men?" I asked. "They're all in prison." Once again I experienced the destruction and hopelessness caused by our pervasive racism in the Black Belt. After my all-day empowerment workshop, while I was on my way to a more elitist black high school in Atlanta, I heard on the car radio that a devastating hurricane was headed my way. The reports of this approaching "historic superstorm" got worse and worse, as did the weather around me, so I drove faster, trying to reach Mary's house sooner. She'd moved into the brick housing project in town, where I'd be safe. But barely had I reached my safe haven when Mary came running out in the rain, shouting that she'd lost cell-phone contact with John, who was out in the woods. With her motherly instinct, she knew something was wrong and insisted we drive out to look for him. The

John still in severe pain a few days after the hurricane in 2011

Showing Klan leader Jeff Berry her new garden in the projects 2005

hurricane was now all around us, and this became the most frightening experience of my life. We couldn't see a yard ahead—it was like driving through a swimming pool except trees were flying through the air all around us. I soon lost any hope of finding him at all—let alone alive—but Mary knew every bend of those dark backroads, and she was determined to get to her son. Then the miracle happened. We found John underneath his truck, which had been tossed up in the air and landed on his foot. We pulled him out, and though he was screaming in pain, we got him back to the house. With girlfriends for life comes also a commitment to their children's lives.

Which leads me back to the question: Was Mary ever my "girlfriend"? Completely different in every sense as we were, it's a miracle in itself that our relationship lasted a lifetime. With a mixture of pride and fear, we both romanticized it for its Romeo-and-Juliet likeness. Since we'd been born on almost the same day, I even tried to find astrological answers to the mystery. She was in every sense a product of her violent circumstances. In her younger years, she was always cursing and yelling, especially at the blacks around her—they themselves were no less vocal. But no matter how many blacks were around, the minute she talked to me she would speak in the most soft-spoken loving voice, often smiling in embarrassment about all the anger she'd just displayed. And then the blacks would break out laughing because they'd never seen how much "peace and love" she contained and probably missed being able to express those long-subdued sides of themselves. But was this a healthy relationship? Was it natural? Whatever kind of love it began as, it naturally evolved over the years into a deeper and deeper physical attraction to each other. After heating water on a stove (made from an old barrel), we loved bathing each other in the tub on the living room floor. We loved cuddling and holding each other all night. I was one day reminded of this when Vibeke, my Danish wife, moved to Boston to help handle mail orders for my book. By mistake she opened a letter from Mary, who'd written about how she loved lying in my arms all night. "Why can you do that with Mary but not me?" Vibeke teased. When I first met Vibeke, I said, "Remember, when you marry me, you're also marrying all the people in my book who brought us together." And since then she's met many, housing some of them in Denmark as if we were one big family.

No, the real obstacle in my relationship with Mary was not of a moral nature although she was deeply religious and attended church throughout her life. She was very much grounded in herself and loved performing for the camera crews I brought with me. When Danish TV filmed us sitting down to a meal together, she insisted that we say grace together (as we normally did).
After all my pondering about it, I finally understood the deeper problem behind our 40-year-long celibacy: Whenever we got close to slipping into a sexual dimension of our love for each other, we immediately recognized the historical pitfall before us—we would be continuing the centuries-old white rape of the black woman. We both wanted to feel detached from the "nighttime integration" Mary had been a victim of. We wanted our love to be free and untainted, but this was impossible. We were the ultimate victims of this deep pitfall, which prevented us from fully exercising what should be normal between a man and a woman: "free love." I often wondered whether a truly healthy interracial relationship is possible in a society that obviously is not yet free.

And so the years went by until one day in 2009 Mary got both cancer and a brain tumor, which gave us other things to think about. I wasn't used to giving oxygen and at night got tangled up in all the hoses around Mary, but, luckily, I had a Danish traveler with me who could help. In some ways it once again felt like a bound relationship, but primarily I felt the joy of being able to help a person I'd been close to since we were young, exultant, and thought we could change the world. It was strange and yet wonderful to push a seriously ill old woman around town in a stroller to her doctor's appointments, pay her medical bills, and look after her. Since we knew we'd never see each other again, I was glad that my friend from Denmark, could take a lot of pictures of us. After Mary's death

Danish TV travelled without me to interview Mary about the fire 26 years later after the tragedy

Left - Mary 42-years old in 1989 - Right - Saying grace before our meals. 1991

in 2014, I had another Danish film crew with me to make the movie, Jacob Holdt – an American Love Story. I wanted to take them to the old shack where Mary and I had spent so many years together, but could hardly find it since it was now completely covered by dense jungle. It was depressing and dangerous to walk on the rotten floor, but I was glad that all my posters were still hanging on the walls although a cameraman noticed that one of them had been defaced: someone had cut out the square with a nude photo. "Those crazy Americans," we all agreed. "Why didn't they cut out the photos of violence?" The crew wanted to film me in there telling the story of my life with Mary, but I suddenly started to cry uncontrollably. It was as if years of oppressed emotions suddenly poured out of me. When my daughter saw it at the film premiere, she said, "Dad, I've never before seen you cry like this."

But in the meantime another miracle had taken place, for three years earlier Mary had for a short time recovered from the brain tumor. And so we had one more time been together a last time before her death. I'll never forget that last evening, sitting with her in her home in town. She still was the only one in the projects who kept a garden like the one we had around her shack, with all the flowers she loved—even the banana tree under which I'd photographed her and a Klan leader in 2005. Her yard stood out in sharp contrast in this drab project where everyone else had only worn grass around their homes. Inside she was still active, making quilts, hats, and clothes for her six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. With her help I was making ancestor trees with their names and birth dates so I'd be able to remember them and stay in touch with them after her death. This is how I discovered that many of the youngest had been given African names, like Neikata and Takivie. Times had changed since I'd met Mary 40 years ago, when they all had slave names. And then, on our last night together, just as I was about to fall asleep at her side, something happened. Out of the blue she said, "Why don't you give me some of your sweet stuff now? Don't you think it's time for that before it's too late for us?" And without waiting for an answer, she swung me with one arm on top of her huge belly. I was paralyzed by confusion. She was extremely overweight from her medication and in my head I again heard my lecture audiences accusing me of "taking advantage of a poor black woman." And so, to avoid that from my readers as well, I'm not going to reveal what happened—we all have a right to some privacy, don't we? But I admit that I found the idea of making love to a great-grandmother repulsive but at the same time attractive—with its promise that it's never too late "to make it" and become "Free at last, Free at last, Thank God almighty we are free at last."

"The thing about being a Negro in America is that you can never escape the question of your identity. She felt a sudden desire to break away from it all, to run, to hide herself somewhere where she could be free." —Nella Larsen, writing about having a boyfriend in Denmark in her autobiographical novel, Quicksand.
From 1909 to 1910 Nella had my grandfather as a teacher in Askov Folk High School, near where I grew up, and where 66 years later my grandmother saw my first slideshow, "American Pictures."

Our liberated shack with my posters after we kicked her white sugar daddies out in 1985

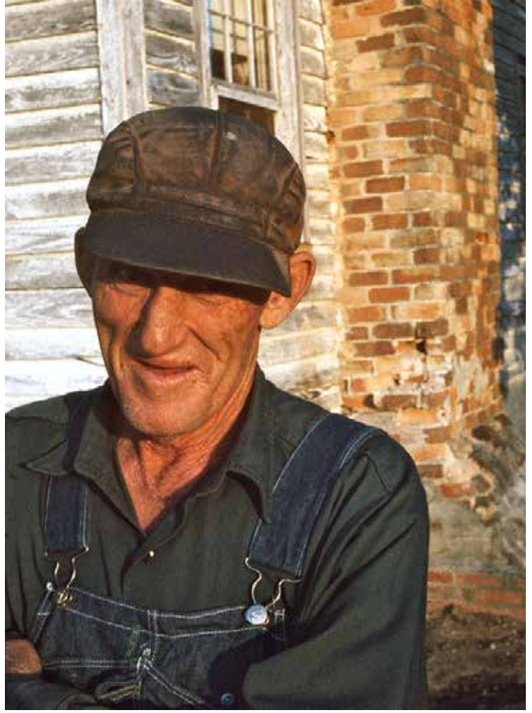
"I'm homesick," she wrote, "not for America but for Negroes." She returned to the U.S. to become a nurse in the Tuskegee Institute, only a few miles from the woods where 57 years later my story with Mary would unfold. It is also where I would become the first white lecturer for as long as anyone could remember. After her stint at the Tuskegee Institute, Nella Larsen went north, joined the Harlem Renaissance, and became famous. She never revealed whether her relationship with a Danish man was sexual. Just like mine with Mary. But in our mutual life choices, I recognize the same tragic paradox: the desire for love in a world where even love is colonized by skin color and history.

"All hearts are black when they break" – Nella Larsen

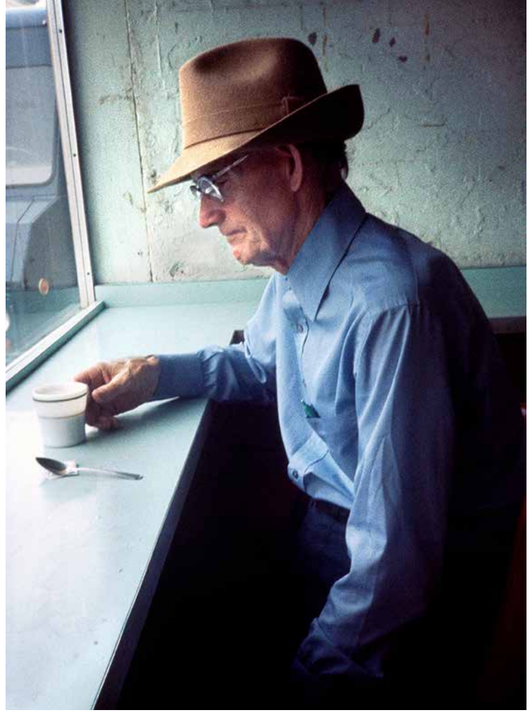
Helping Mary with her blocked arteries and oxygen hoses in 2009

From the Danish movie "An American love story" made in 2016 after Mary's death

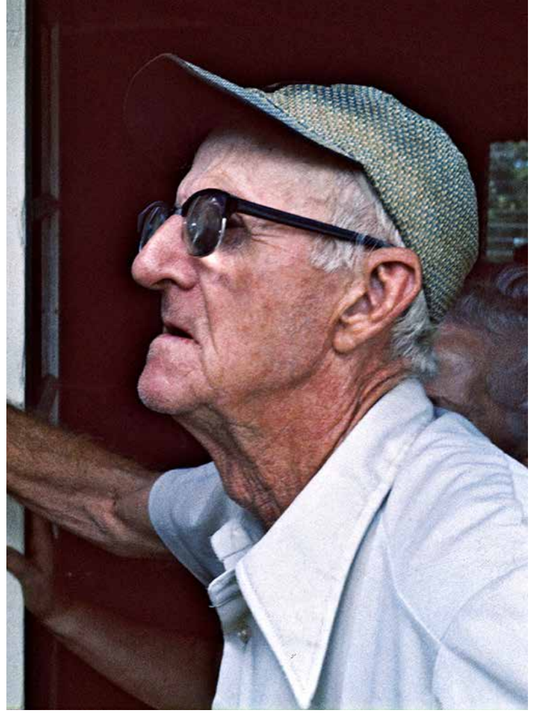
1975 - rural AL – Listen to him speak in interview below



1974 - rural NC



1973 - Baltimore



1975 - Troy, AL

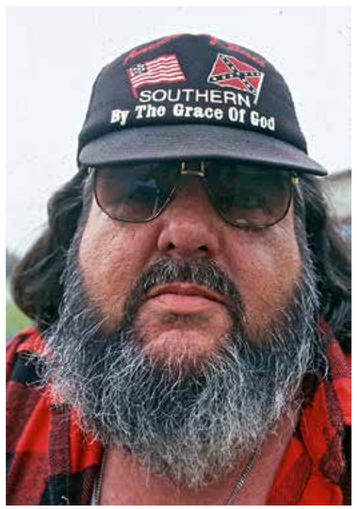
My Blue-eyed Crime Against the Prisoners of Historic Apartheid

"Hatred, which could destroy so much, never failed to destroy the man who hated, and this was an immutable law. Whoever debases others is debasing himself." - James Baldwin

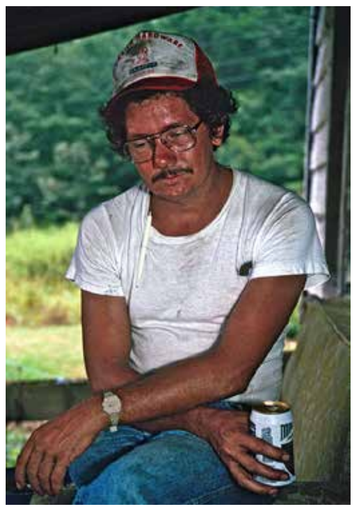
Recording of a white man (top left) who picked me up close to Mary's place in Alabama:
- What do you think about integration?
- I don't go for it at all. Let them be on their own and go ahead. Hell, I don't believe in mingling up with them, going to school with them, going to church with them. I've never had anything against niggers. They can't help being a nigger any more than I can help being a white. They are a different race of people and let them be different...
- You always voted for Wallace? – I sure have... but he has got nothing against niggers as far as them being niggers is concerned... There is a lot of niggers who vote for him... he gets lots of nigger votes...
- What did you think of Martin Luther King? – Who... Martin Luther King?... Why - (spitting out the window) he wasn't nothing but a troublemaker... a communist agitator...

This Southern racist is a textbook example of the oppression we go through to become oppressors. The innocence of his childhood had been systematically oppressed by his parents' incomprehensible injunctions: "Niggers are dirty. Don't play with those children; they'll stab you." As with children throughout the South, his natural zestfulness, appetite for life, and affection for others were suffocated. While he was being hurt, his mind shut down, and over the years the accumulation of additional pain became chronic distress patterns. Incessantly he now had to replay his unhealed distress experiences like a broken record: "nigger, nigger, nigger." Listening to such voices of history, I knew that the bombing of Mary's house was the extreme but logical consequence of this oppression. If he'd grown up in the North, he wouldn't have ended up with such an evil mindset. And maybe even less so had he been raised in the Denmark of my youth (before today's racism). When I showed him my pictures—of Mary in bed, for example—the degree of my crime (to a southern white) against this apartheid system dawned on me.
As a "neutral" Scandinavian, I felt that Mary was extremely beautiful and attractive. I therefore got quite a shock when I saw the disgust this white man expressed at the thought of being next to her "dirty, dark, repulsive skin." Little by little, I realized that this negative view was rooted in white supremacy and had ended up becoming an internalized deeply held honest conviction that had infected not only whites all over America, but also blacks' view of dark-skinned beauty.

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."
-Nelson Mandela

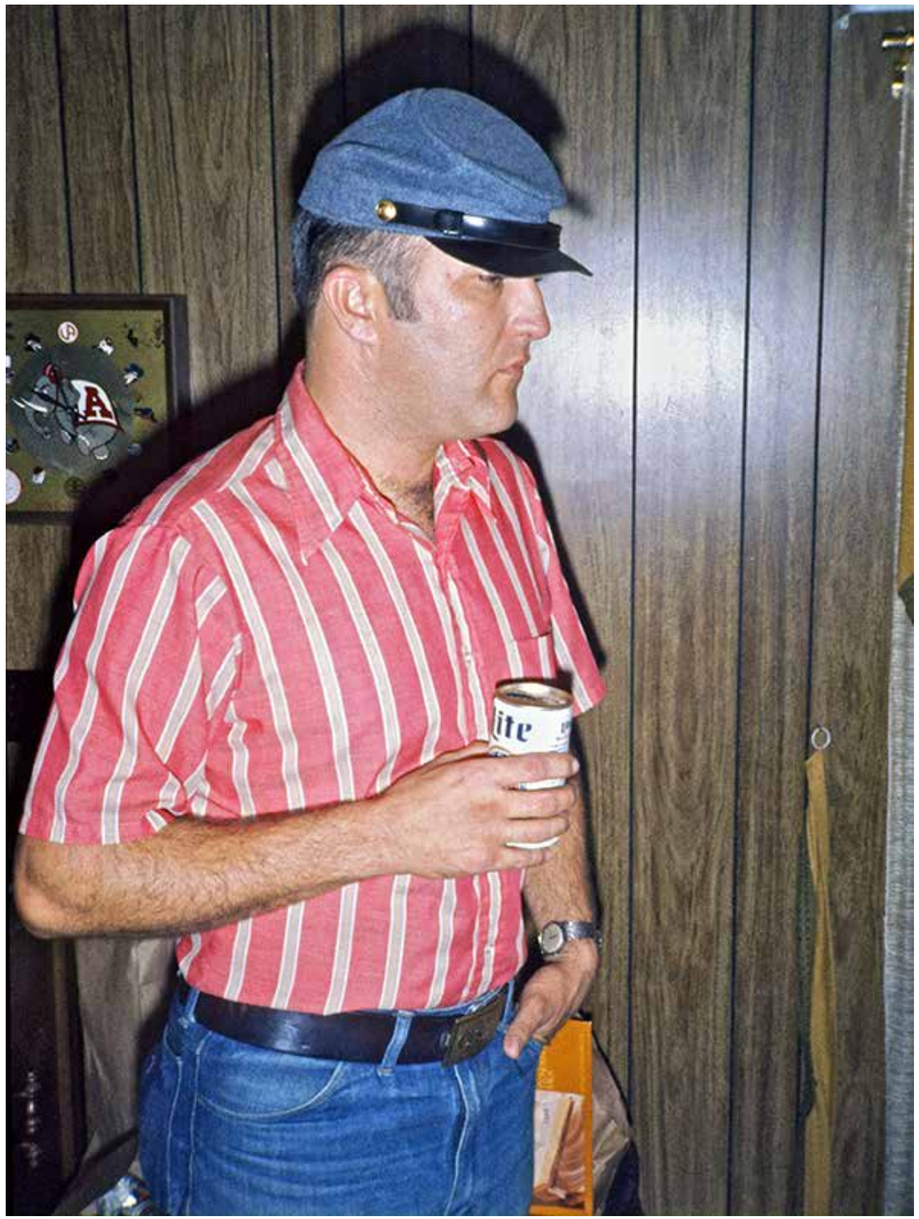


2003 - Angola, LA



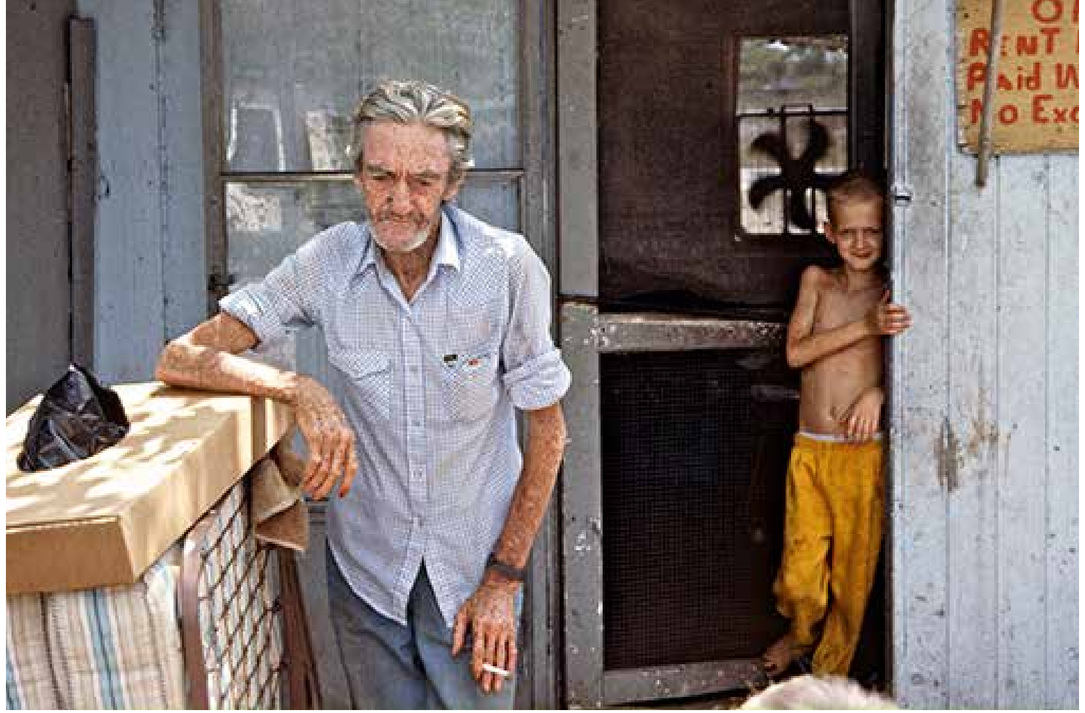
1975 - Bullock County, AL

Left: Interview with truckdriver above
Right: Song by Mary Clayton about "Southern man" illustrated in slideshow



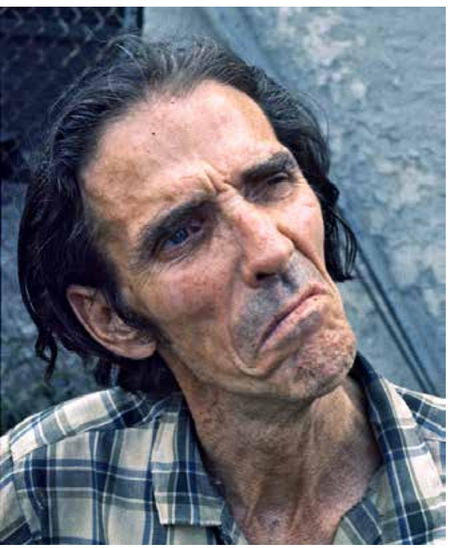
1974 - Jackson, MS

1974 - Troy, AL



1996 - Immokalee, FL - Below 1973 - Baltimore

1975 - Meridian, MS



The Other Victims: Poor Whites in a Divided America

"The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is black advancement. It is not the mere presence of black people that is the problem; rather, it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship."
- Carol Anderson, White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide

Vagabonds and blacks have a special relationship to poor whites. With their guns hanging inside pickup trucks as symbols of power, they're the ones who shoot at hitchhikers late on Friday nights, throw beer bottles at you other nights, and try to run you over at all hours. While the better-off whites set the tone, the poor exercise much of the direct physical oppression of black people, who contemptuously call them "poor white trash." It was they who were given the brutal and sadistic roles of slave overseers and catchers. Like poor whites today, the overseers sensed that they were held in contempt by plantation society and took out their insecurities and anger on the blacks through acts of relentless cruelty. It was to them that demagogic racist politicians addressed themselves, but when blacks got voting rights and swung the political pendulum toward more liberal politicians, poor whites lost much of their policing role and the little pride they had.
Like blacks, they suffer from self-hatred and react violently against their surroundings by, for instance, throwing trash all over. They too have had their intelligence impaired by malnourishment and neglect and can be even more fearful than blacks.

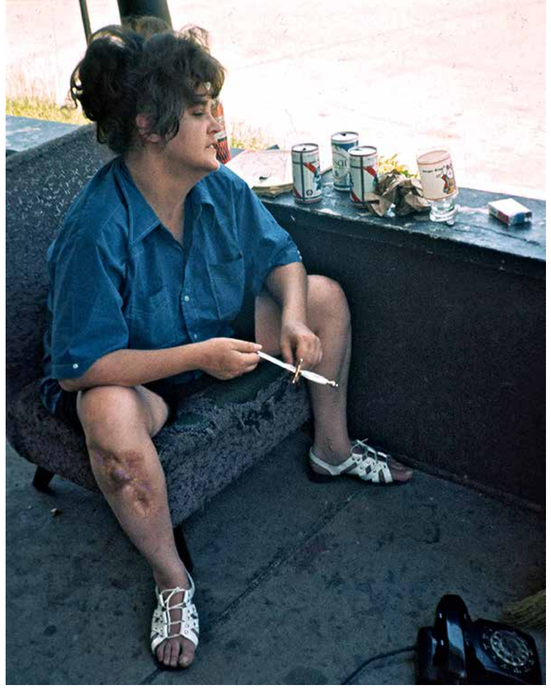
Because I feared them myself, my inner mind betrayed me, so I couldn't send the messages of love necessary to open their love. When I approached their shacks, they often ran inside and locked the doors.
When I went hunting with them and saw their cruelty to animals, I realized the source of their violence and abusive behavior was their own early oppression—beaten as helpless children into their insensitive and repressive social role.

This cycle of mistreatment is similar to that suffered by blacks, who tend to replay their violent experience on their own kind. Poor whites not only have their own children, but also blacks as a vulnerable and socially sanctioned target group.

Having always been told that whites are superior, they feel left behind when they see blacks with better jobs. They feel that "niggers have gotten too many rights" and that "no nigger can ever achieve the same status as even the lowest white." They therefore sense that they fell off the wagon when they see that many blacks today live better and have better jobs than themselves.
This, I sense, is also the deeper reason for why many of my old poor white friends voted for Trump. Because they watched their hope for middle class status steadily shrink during the years of Reaganomic class warfare, and because they see the supply of fentanyl expanding, their percentages and deeper frustrations remain the same.

2003 - Philadelphia, MS

1986 - anywhere - Below historical photo of lynching



1972 - Jackson, MI

1974 - rural Kinston, NC

Between Contempt and Cruelty: The role of Poor Whites in oppression

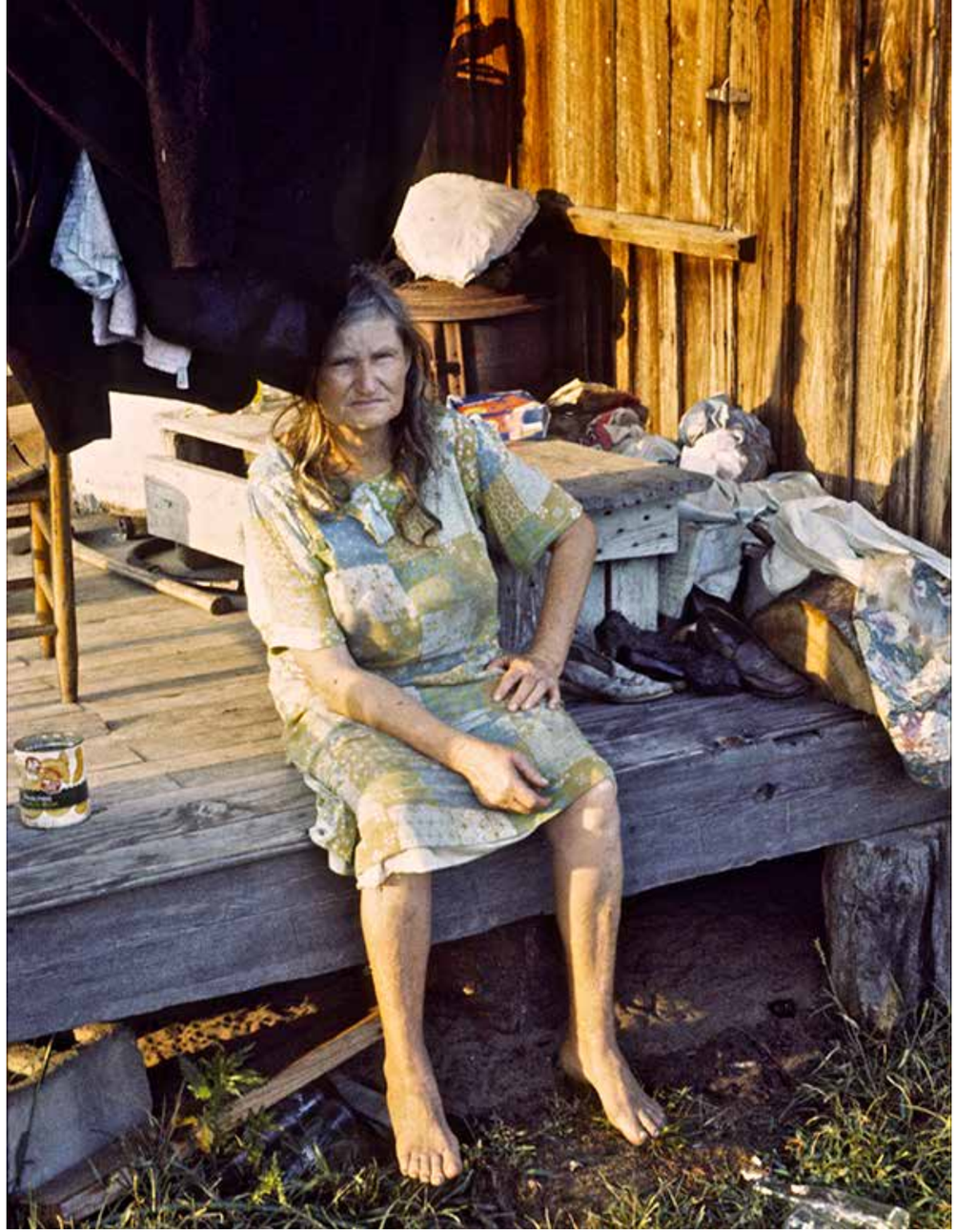
"Racism as a form of skin worship, and as a sickness and a pathological anxiety for America, is so great, until the poor whites – rather than fighting for jobs or education –fight to remain pink and fight to remain white. And therefore they cannot see an alliance with people that they feel to be inherently inferior." – Jesse Jackson

They don't understand the inner dynamics of our system, which often leaves them unemployed, and instead blame someone who's a little different—just as similar groups in Europe use Muslim immigrants as scapegoats, Irish Protestants use Catholics, Israelis use Palestinians, Japanese use Koreans, Indians and Africans use lower castes and tribes, and everybody hallucinates about the Jew—especially where no Jews exist!

Since no society or system has ever been free from oppression, we must in every new generation learn to embrace and heal patterns of anger before they accumulate and manifest as genocide. If we don't dare to confront the dark sides of ourselves, we all too easily act out of displaced anger. With no cradle-to-grave equality and security in America, the poor are especially at risk here. Their racism, poor education, and our persistent insensitive smear campaigns against them as "rednecks" and "crackers" makes them even more rightwing than most Americans and against any social safety net that would also benefit blacks. Unable to attack the real targets of their frustration, white anger often turns to racial violence. Such bitterness caused poor whites to lynch almost 5,000 blacks.

1974 - NYC

1996 - rural MS



1974 - rural Elizabethtown, NC

1975 - San Francisco

1974 - Jacksonville, FL

1974 - Little Italy, NY

“Strange Fruit” in new guises

Teenagers Kill Black, 15

Continued From Page 8

Two other residents confirmed this part of her statement.

"They were encouraging the kids to attack them," said woman. "They were shouting 'get the nigger' and 'kill the bastard!'"

Several members of the social club, which is just north of the park where Johnson was found and across the street from where Sanders was beaten, have denied seeing the attack or taking any part in it.

Police have canvassed buildings in the predominantly Italian neighborhood searching for witnesses with no success.

A Post reporter also interviewed dozens of people in the area without finding any witnesses to the attack other than the woman mentioned. She asked to remain anonymous because she feared possible reprisals against her family. But he indicated she would talk to police.

Many members of the community said they'd heard about the incident but none admitted to actually seeing the attack or knowing any-

an officer close to the investigation, "because no one is talking to us. But since no white kids were hurt and accused it isn't likely that we didn't find any weapons the black kids were doing the attacking."

Several incidents with racial overtones have erupted in recent months between local whites and black teenagers attending nearby Chelsea HS and Food and Maritime Trade HS. Community and religious leaders have insisted that those incidents were not racially motivated but were caused by a natural conflict of interests over the use of a local gymnasium.

Neither of the youths beat-

1974 - Little Italy, NY

“The Nazis were impressed by the American custom of lynching its subordinate caste of African-Americans, having become aware of the ritual torture and mutilations that typically accompanied them. Hitler especially marveled at the American “knack for maintaining an air of robust innocence in the wake of mass death.” - Isabel Wilkerson, Caste

The lynchings continue – just in other forms. Derrick Johnson was only 15 years old when he strayed into a poor white neighborhood in New York. Whites usually instill racism in their children more subtly, but here they stood in doorways and incited the children with advice such as: “Kill the nigger” and “Kill the bastard.” And the children attacked Derrick with baseball bats in broad daylight, while none of the adults would later speak to the police.
In Europe, we know how totalitarian forces can manipulate such poor, embittered whites into explosive hatred of minorities. Here, it led to fascism. In the US, it often manifests itself as unpunished mob violence. What they have in common, however, is that this “popular anger” is historically rarely directed against those in power, but downwards – against those who are already marginalized.

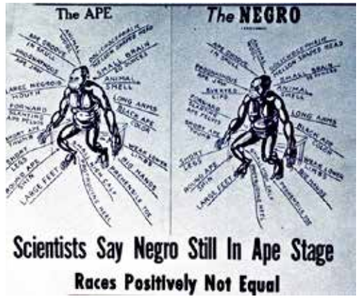
1972 - Miami, FL

When the US inspired Hitler

“Hitler had studied America from afar. The Nazis were impressed by the American use of second-class citizenship and segregation as a model for what they were trying to achieve in Germany. They marveled at the American ability to subjugate its minorities without international scrutiny.” — Isabel Wilkerson, Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

My Nazi friend in Baltimore had initially been a communist, but when he discovered that they were fighting for equality with black people, he switched to the Nazis, who believed that white people were superior and that “all niggers should be sent back to Africa.”
The Nazis in the North shared the desire of many white Europeans today to keep our outcasts out of sight—the evasive racism that refuses to integrate. The Klan in the South does not want to get rid of them, but only to keep them down or in their place through dominant racism, often with threats and the acceptance of the law. I saw how the police at Klan meetings disarmed blacks in the area but allowed Klan members to carry pistols and submachine guns. One night, I sneaked into one of their cross burnings dressed in a white robe and recorded this speech:

Both from 1973 - Baltimore



1978 - rural Gadsden, AL

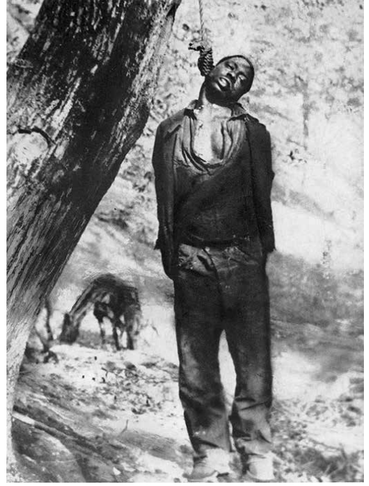
1978 - rural Gadsden, AL

1974 - Gainesville, AL

1973 - rural Louisiana

1978 - rural Gadsden, AL

1975 - Tarboro,NC



Historical photos of lynchings

1978 - rural Gadsden, AL

Confronting the deeper pain behind of White Hatred

"I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain." – James Baldwin

"Yes, the conspiracy gives us a lot to think about ... and most of you are just thinking about them monkeys running around pulling their own tails. You are still aggravated and agitated by all them little monkeys running around yelling: "I'm discriminated against, I want that policeman fired," and all that kind of junk. And it incites you to want to do something. But friends, the conspiracy is deeper than a bunch of wild jungle-infested Ubangi-lipped niggers. And there's three things you can't give them! Absolutely only three things: You can't give a nigger a fat lip, a black eye and a job! (applause) *... On another occasion we ran these four niggers down and was ready to... to...* (indicating rope-lynching) (applause)*... and just when we were ready to launch our missiles towards their burr-head, somebody said, "Hold it, we have them and we thank you for catching them." So they took them down and locked them up. And the next morning, the mayor said to our official:*

"Sir, we are sorry, but we had to let them go, because I don't want my town torn up." And these niggers jumped up laughing hysterical "Ha, Ha, Ha," like monkeys jumping'n pulling their tails. (laughter)

Friends, some years ago the Klan was called to Washington to go before the investigating committee—believe it or not—on the assassination of King. They turned this committee over to two—not blacks. I will refer to them as niggers because they squandered five million of your hard-earned tax dollars to come up with an answer to the assassination of King! Well, first of all: You can't assassinate a nigger! (applause) You can only assassinate a statesman or a man of renowned character and ability. You don't assassinate trash!"

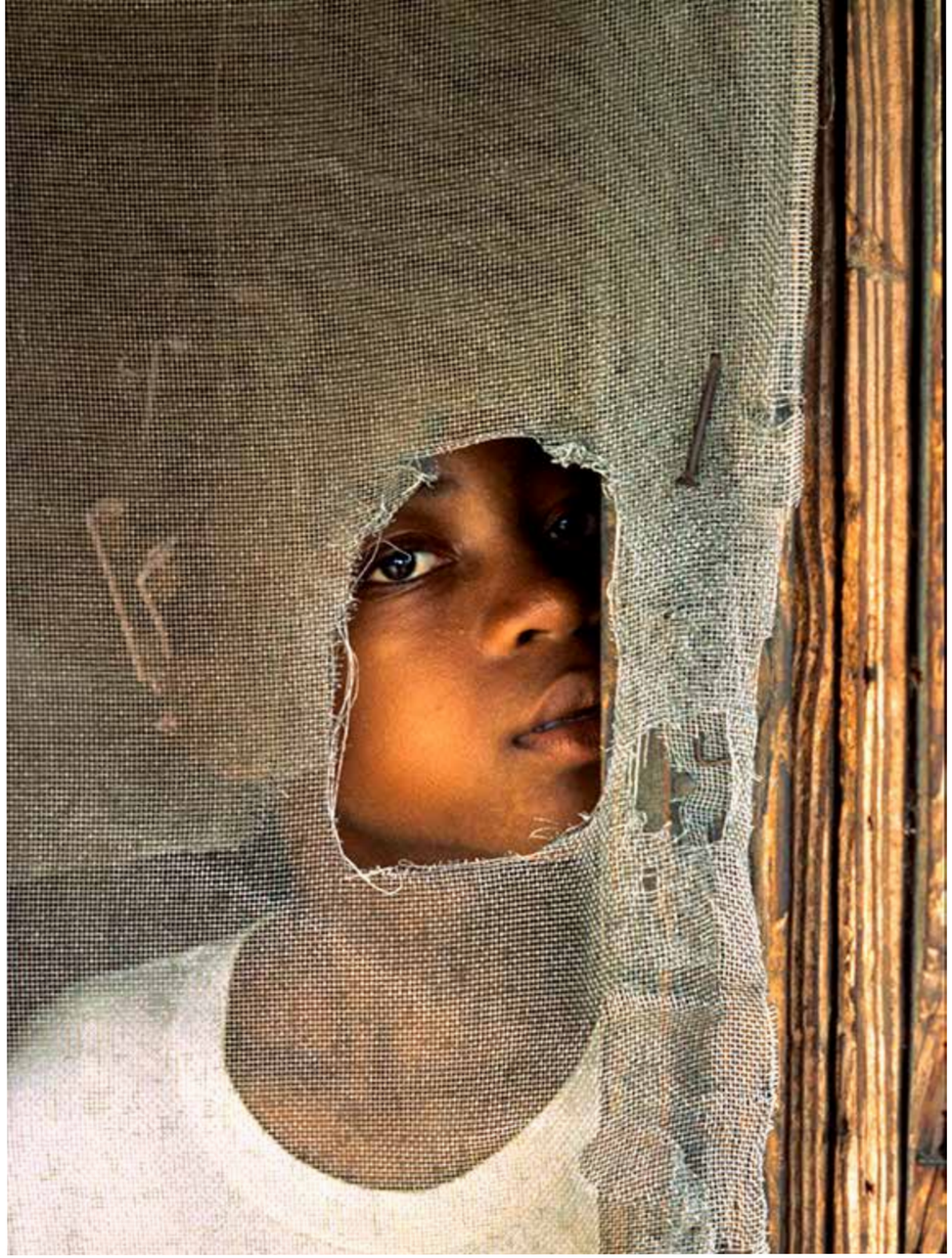
"Individually, these lonesome and despairing losers were often just as afraid of me as I was of them. In spite of all my prejudice, I couldn't help but like them as individuals. Human beings ready to murder what they call "trash" are people whom society has perpetually indoctrinated with the basic feeling that they are themselves trash. Their insecurity and self-contempt gives them a strange categorical need to hate others."

Yes, that's what I wrote in my book in 1984, when I was trying to understand the Klan after I'd picked up a poor hitchhiker on my lecture tour. During our long drive he revealed things that made me suspect he'd been a victim of incest. So in a loving way I asked about his childhood, and sure enough, he poured out how his father had raped him again and again. Yet, he tried to defend his father, which in my experience is how such victims begin redirecting their anger and scapegoating others. I also realized that, as with most of the abused children I deal with, he'd never received any help. We who are better-off don't like the distrustful vibrations we get from the children of pain and reserve our love for children capable of radiating the love they themselves were shaped by. And nowhere do you have more time to give them emotional therapy than on America's endless highways. They are always incredibly grateful and will do anything for you afterwards.

Illustrated recording of the Klan speech

And so, after showing him my book, he now begged me to come with him to this Klan gathering. First to the open daytime recruiting meeting, where I couldn't help feeling compassion for the poor white sympathizers shown above. Before we went to the secret cross lighting (for members only), I gave him a meal and let him use my phone card to call his mother. But his face suddenly contorted in anger and pain as his mother told him that two blacks had just killed his uncle. He'd promised to protect me and cover me up in a hood, but did I now dare walk with him and 50 crazy Klansmen with guns deep into a dark forest when he knew I was anti-racist (a "nigger lover")? Would he betray me? I was so afraid that I called my family in Denmark to say, "If I don't call back before midnight, alert the police." How naïve! I'd already seen how the Klan worked with the police. But he never betrayed me, which again taught me one of my most important lessons in life:
ALL people in pain—and he was now in pain from both abuse and the murder of his beloved uncle—have a greater craving for OUR love than for expressing their pain and anger in the form of hate and violence.

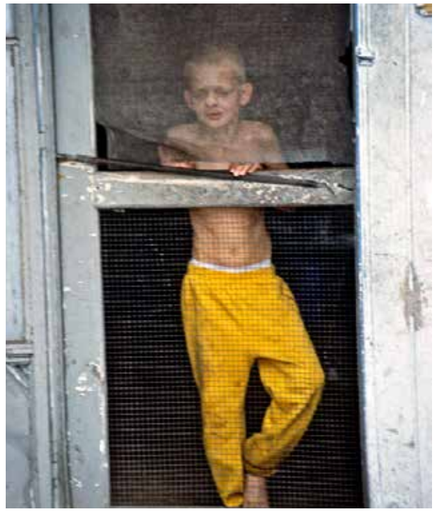
In 1981, Michael Donald was lynched in Mobile, Alabama. Members of the Ku Klux Klan kidnapped a 19-year-old college student at gunpoint on a city street "to show Klan strength in Alabama". The next morning, his body was found hanging in a predominantly black neighborhood. One of the Klansmen, James Knowles, was later sentenced to death by electrocution. Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center recounts how the audience wept as the convicted lyncher described how Michael had begged for his life while the Klansmen prepared the noose around his neck. Police photo



1975 - Waynesboro, GA

1978 - rural Gadsden, AL

1991 - Woody the night I picked him up hitch-hiking. Listen to him below



1996 - Immokalee, FL

Uncovering the Pain Behind Violent Hatred

"Whites need the "nigger", for it is the "nigger" within themselves they cannot accept."
- James Baldwin

In my vagabond years in the '70s most Americans seemed to feel good about themselves and I found hardly any Klan activity. But the increasing mistreatment of children I have seen since then seems to go hand in hand with the growth of the Klan and white supremacy groups under presidents Obama and Trump. Here is about how I came into a family of later Trump supporters. One night in 1991 I picked up Woody, this dirt-poor hitchhiker in Mississippi, who told me that he and his two brothers had personally killed so many blacks, that they had lost count of them.

- I don't know if he killed the first two. I got blood on me from, I know he busted his head open real bad.

- Hmm

- John busted open his head real, real bad... Took a big whole piece out of his head – and blood got on me then. That's cause I was holding the dude. Every time his heart would beat, blood would squirt out about 5–6 feet, man. The guy ran about ten steps, then just fell – face first. I'll even take you by the old post office tonight and show you it to you, right where it happened. Then they got a big sign says 'No Niggers Allowed' when you go in there on the highway.

- Still? What year is this?

- This is 91 now, fixing to be 92 and they got a sign saying 'No Niggers Allowed'.

- When you went out to kill them, would he talk about it all day before or did you just happen to...?

- No, it just happened. It just was one of those things. He was going down the street and he just felt like doing it. He'd seen them, so he did it....

- Right here is where this guy fell after my brother stabbed
him. That may be the cops. Right here is where he fell. I'll show you where he got stabbed at. He got stabbed right on the other side of this telephone pole, right here. And then he ran ten feet and fell. Let's go before the cops are coming 'cause they are bad here at night time.

- What did he actually say?

- He actually said 'I'm gonna kill me a nigger tonight'. He said it all day long and when we'd come back from over the tracks Sammy told him, 'I bet you wont kill that one right there.' And this was a big nigger, you know. And John says 'Bet me!'. And Sammy says, 'I'll bet you.' And he goes, 'Never mind about the betting.' He walked over there and he says, 'Hey, did you meet your maker?' and he stabbed him. The guy's eyes rolled to the back of his head and John twisted the knife and then he pulled it out. The blood, when it came out, it hit me and Sammy.

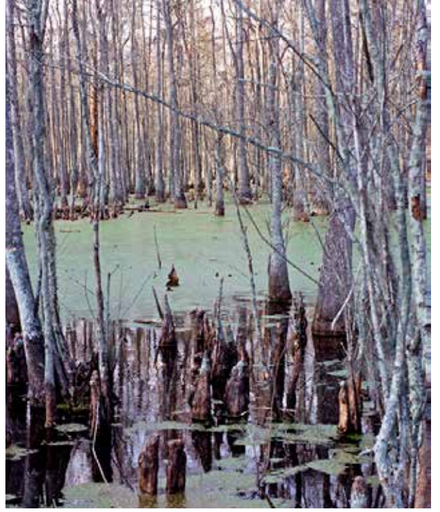
- How did it happen when....?

- He goes out and he kills niggers for fun. He tells me he likes to see the fear in their face when they die. It was like when we was riding down River Road I was telling you about how Sammy called one over to the car and John jumped out and shot him. Well, two of them split, and one of them stayed there, you know, he was freaking out. I guess he was young or something, you know. Sammy started beating him in the head with some bottle that he had. And then John started kicking him and stuff – and when they had him on the ground bleeding and where he couldn't move, John just stomped him until he died. The only thing I've never seen John do, was go out and run over the
niggers that he used to go out and run over. But I've seen blood on the car and....like I said, I took T shirts and shirts and stuff like that out from under the car after he ran them over. I've seen him beat up many, many niggers many times and leave them for dead.

- How many would you say?

- How many? More than I can count on my fingers and toes.

1975 - Waynesboro, GA



1996 - swamps, LA

As always with violent people, I asked about his childhood.
His eyes filled with tears when he told me how the three brothers had constantly been beaten and abused by their deeply alcoholic parents.

- From as early as I remember I've got whippings from my mom. She used to come in drunk.... She would hit you anywhere she could hit you. When she whips you with a board, if you move and it hits you somewhere else, you shouldn't have moved.....

It is important always to give such children of pain all the love and affection we can muster.
In my travels I have often been amazed how little caring it takes to make these encapsulated and discouraged people raise their heads again and feel better about themselves.
People who feel good about themselves will not intentionally hurt other people or even think badly of them. Only people in pain wish to harm others. All the violent racists I meet these days have without exception been mistreated or humiliated in childhood. The cross burnings and swastikas are just their inept cry for our help and attention, and it takes so incredibly little nurturing from us to help them out of their oppressive patterns.
Five years later I found some of Woody's victims, such as Sarah's family, who had been stabbed by Woody in their sleep. (Read on page 213 what later happened).
Their shattered lives needed similar nurturing not to be destroyed by the paralyzing fear and unforgiving hate they had developed toward their fellow citizens.
Our knowledge of how such hatred can continue indefinitely led the South African government to wisely pardon all perpetrators of racial crimes committed during apartheid.
My friend Woody had begun to understand that since he'd never had anybody to help him heal his pain, he had unconsciously turned it outward against blacks in such a horrifying way: he described how, after prolonged torture, they murdered each one and threw their bodies into the rivers and swamps of Mississippi.

- Did you usually get rid of them by throwing them in rivers and swamps?

- Oh, yeah, many times we dumped them in the swamps....

Here is to the state of Mississippi,
for underneath her borders the devil draws no line.
If you drag her muddy rivers, nameless bodies you will find.
Oh, the factories of the forests have hidden a thousand crimes.
The calendar is lying when it reads the present time.
Oh, here's to the land you have torn out the heart of:
Mississippi, find yourself another country to be part of!

Song by my friend Phil Ochs. In 1971 I introduced him nightly on stage in The Gaslight in New York. He, in turn, introduced me to the hate of the South before I'd dared to go there.

Woody's recorded hate speech followed by Phil Ochs's song

All from 1975 - Washington, GA - Listen to my interview with Mrs. Barnett and Hill below

The White Savior Complex: On paternalistic racism

"Racism oppresses its victims, but also binds the oppressors, who sear their consciences with more and more lies until they become prisoners of those lies. They cannot face the truth of human equality because it reveals the horror of the injustices they commit." — Alvin Poussaint, Why Blacks Kill Blacks

In Georgia, where I lived with the Barnett family in an old plantation home, I learned about a kind of racism based not on hatred but on a historically conditioned paternalistic love for blacks. Mrs. Barnett spent days taking me around to families her family had once owned—apparently a very short time ago in her imagination (and, as I discovered, in the black consciousness as well).

Mrs. Barnett: *This is the bill of sale to my great- grandfather from Mr. Cadman for Lucinda, her children, and her increase forever. The price was $1,400.*
Mrs. Hill (her friend from another plantation home):
But, you see, when they came here they were savages, and I think instead of blaming the South like the North blamed us, I think we deserve a bit of credit. They sold them to us and they knew they were selling us savages. But they just kept sending them. And then they began talking about our harsh treatment, but you know when you had people working for you, you would do everything for them, feed them up, give them clothes and housing, and take care of them.
Mrs. Barnett: *The white people would do anything for the niggers except get off their back, as they say. (laughter) One thing is sure. We still miss them.*
Mrs. Hill: *Yeah, we do miss them.*

When a "house slave" came in with afternoon tea, the talk, as always in the Southern aristocracy, turned to the follies of their servants—a way of maintaining their paternalistic attitude toward blacks and thus of giving themselves the social distinction of previous times.

My Interview with Mrs. Barnett and Mrs. Hills: Five years later, when I gave them the book, they laughed when I told them how the Europeans had laughed at them for missing the slaves.

All from 1975 - Tupper Plantation home, Washington, GA

"The notion of the white savior is really a counterpart to white supremacy. If whiteness reigns supreme, if all the power rests with white people, then the power to save rests with white people." - Honorée Fanonne Jeffers

What Mrs. Barnett misses isn't slaves as a workforce or as property but the former symbiotic dependence of slave and master. The fact that one could lose a slave worth more than $1,400 through sickness instilled in the white upper class a paternal concern and sense of responsibility for their slaves. In Mrs. Barnett this love showed itself in her work on behalf of blacks imprisoned for life—in other words, in a need to express love for a group of blacks who, like the slaves, are not free.

Was it this kind of condescending racism I myself was taking on in America?
How long could I hold onto the naïve notion that as a foreigner I'd be able to keep myself afloat in an ocean of racism that had drowned everyone else?

1975 - Phila, MS. Rachel here was raped and murdered when 14

1973 - Natchez, MS

How Paternalism Undermined Black Autonomy

"The Southern belle is a myth, a product of the romantic imagination. She is not real. She is a creation of the white South to justify its exploitation of black women." - bell hooks

In the South I experienced two completely opposite white reactions toward the oppressed: hatred and love. The more I saw these peculiar distress patterns as products of a centuries-old system, the more value judgments, such as good and evil, disintegrated. In spite of their trail of destruction, I could no longer hate these whites. From the moment I showed them respect and understanding, doors began to open everywhere: the doors of Southern hospitality. When I later traveled among South African whites, I was met with an even more overwhelming hospitality, which seemed directly proportional to a greater class difference between blacks and whites. Just as in South Africa, blacks in the South receive the traditional friendliness as long as they have underclass status. They are not paid for their work so much as for their servility and humility, for knowing "their place" and being dependent. Their passive resistance to this subjugation is seen as "irresponsibility" and "shiftlessness," which further confirms the "necessity" of the paternal relationship, thereby elevating white status. This artificially high status adds to the psychic surplus displayed, for instance, in an exuberant hospitality and friendliness toward the individual but not the group, such as "negroes," "Yankees," or "communists."

In one plantation home, I'd arrived with my short-hair wig on, but the hostess, Emely Kelley, was falling increasingly in love with me, and one night I surprised the dinner party by displaying all of my hair. Emely burst out, "I know you're a communist, but I like you anyway." This hospitable class may not participate in white terrorist acts, but it benefits directly from such policing. None of the plantation homes I lived in were locked although they were filled with gold, silver, and expensive paintings—right next to some of the poorest people on earth, whom I often saw commit violent crimes against one another. One reason I could move around in even the most violent ghettos in the South without fearing for my life was my realization that the slavery of the 1970s held its protective umbrella over me everywhere. And when you're up against a system so deeply ingrained that even your "Scandinavian blue-eyed idealism" isn't understood, you give up and become a participant. Thus, I soon learned the self-crippling and uncomfortable art of having black maids serve me breakfast in the canopied bed (in a separate room from the hostess) while avoiding committing the crime of making my own bed. In Mississippi I saw the servants spend days dressing up the white "belles" in antebellum gowns so we could continue the old balls of the Confederacy, where blacks are present only in the form of a white woman in blackface acting as "mammy." I loved these seemingly standoffish yet incredibly warm, open, and charming "Southern belles," whose inviolable "white womanhood" was one of the sham reasons to justify the killing of thousands of black men in a terror whose sole purpose was to maintain white supremacy. Yet the first time I returned to Natchez in 1978 and found the town extremely upset about an article in the New York Times describing the plantation homes as "decadent and promiscuous," I had to laugh, having experienced exactly that myself.

1973 - Natchez, MS

1975 - Philadelphia, MS

1975 - Philadelphia, MS. Carl at right became a preacher, his brother spent life in prison

1973 - Natchez, MS

On saying yes

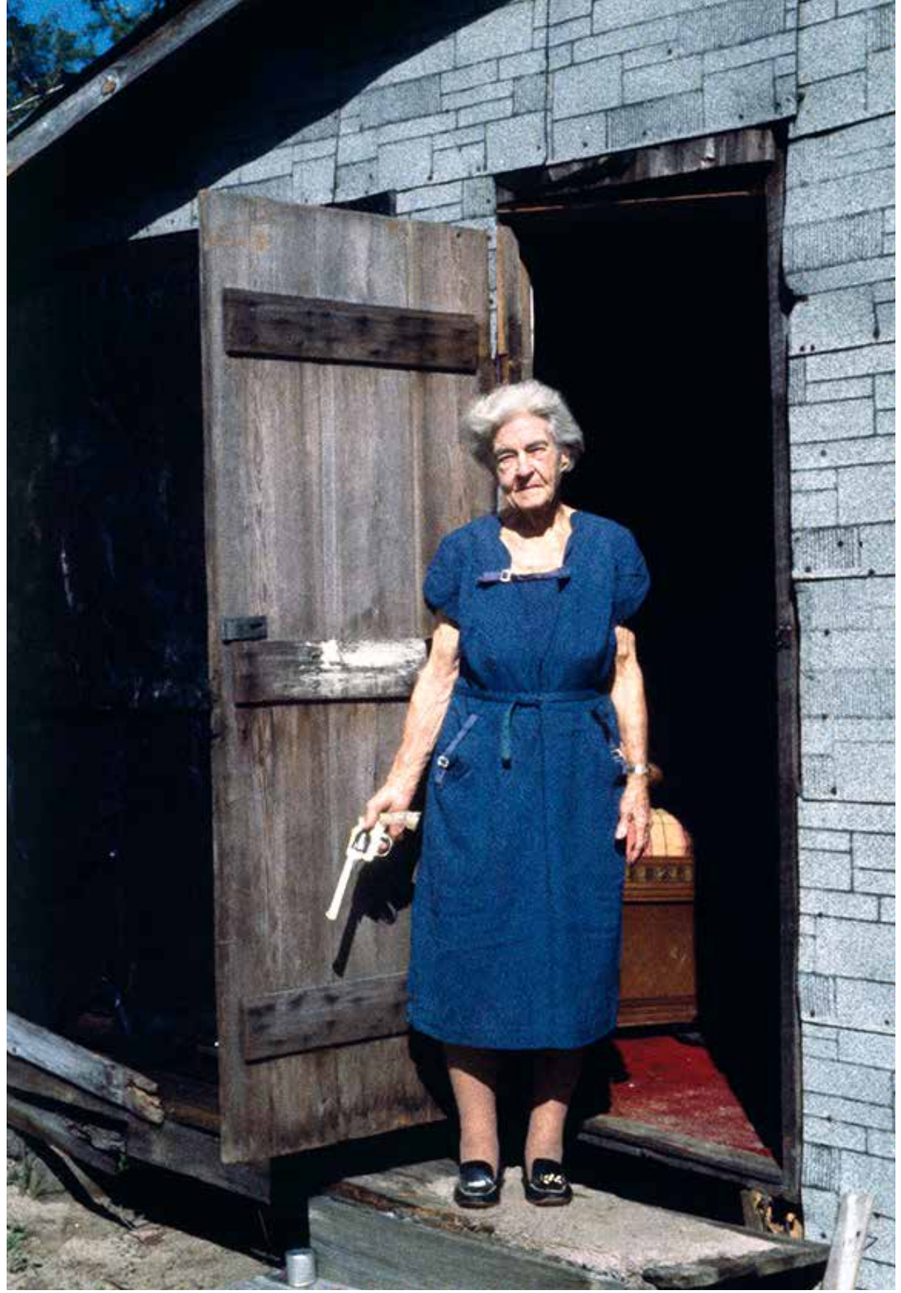
"The family is like the forest: if you are outside it is dense; if you are inside you see that each tree has its own position," Yaa Gyasi in "Homegoing"

The greatest freedom I know is to be able to say yes; the freedom to throw yourself into the arms of every single person you meet. Especially as a vagabond you have the freedom, energy, and time to be fully human toward every individual you meet. The most fantastic lottery I can think of is hitch-hiking. There is a prize every time. Every single person can teach you something. I have never said no to a ride – even if there were pistols lying on the front seat, or four sinister-looking men wearing sunglasses sitting in the car. Every person is like a window through which the larger society can be glimpsed. A man in New York asked me to drive a U-Haul trailer down to Florida. He wouldn't say what was inside. We agreed that I was to get sixty dollars for doing it, but I never got the money. Through various sources I found out that it was the Mafia I had worked for – they preferred to use a naive foreigner for such illegal transport of narcotics, etc. Or maybe it was weapons for the Cuban exiles in Miami? Another time, in Alabama, this poor old woman of 87 asked me to drive her to Phoenix, Arizona. She wanted to go there to die. I helped her board up the windows in her dilapidated shack outside Notasulga, because although she knew very well she would never return, she still didn't want the local blacks moving into it. The whole way out there she sat with a pistol in her hand. She was scared stiff of me because of my long hair and beard, but she had no other way of getting to Arizona. She was so weak that I had to carry her whenever she had to leave the car, but in spite of this she continued to cling to her gun. The car was so old that we could only drive at thirty miles an hour, so the trip took us four days. She had saved for years in order to have enough money for gas, but she had no money for food, so I had to get out several times and steal carrots and other edible things along the road. For most of the journey she talked about Governor Wallace and how she hoped he would become President before she died. I learned more about Alabama on that trip than I could have learned by reading for a lifetime.

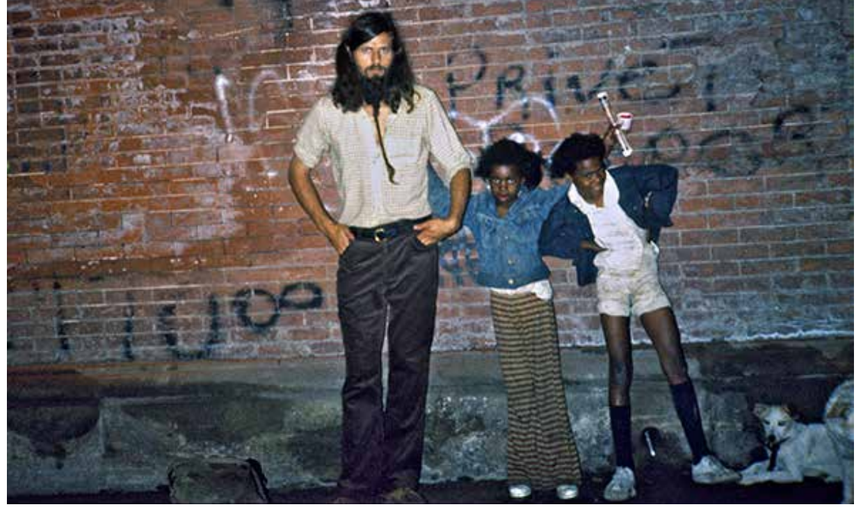
In Florida, two young women picked me up and offered me a brownie. As I was very hungry and sitting in the back seat, I seized the opportunity and ate four whole brownies. I always eat what people offer me, even if it is pills, or dirt, or worse. And every time it gives me a certain insight into society. And so, it was on this day. It turned out they were hash brownies and I had eaten far too many. I got stoned out of my mind and could not hitchhike any more that day, as I was incapable of communicating with the drivers. I walked into Jacksonville and sat in a park waiting for the high to wear off. Two harmless bums came over and sat next to me, but suddenly I became tremendously frightened of them and rushed into the bus station. I did not dare to be out on the street, even in daylight. (The hash made me extremely paranoid, and it is exactly when you send out vibrations of fear to other people that you get jumped). That day I understood the agonizing fear most Americans carry around and can't do anything about. Since that day I have had more understanding of people's reactions in America. Sometimes I, too, feel afraid of other people. One night in New York I heard a voice calling to me from a dark alley down in the sinister area near Ninth Avenue. I was absolutely convinced that if I went into the alley I would be attacked. But I was more afraid that if I did not do it, it would set a precedent, and then I would be paralyzed, like so many others in America. I forced myself to go in there. Of course, it turned out to be only a worn-out five-dollar streetwalker. I gained insight into a kind of suffering I had never encountered before, which proved to me once again that it never hurts to say yes. As a rule, you are directly rewarded for it.

In Detroit, a five-year-old boy persistently asked me to go home with him and take some pictures of his mother. I didn't have time that day but decided to go with him anyway. When we got to his home, I saw that his mother was sick, and four of his seven brothers and sisters had big rat-bites on their backs and legs.

In the beginning I perceived not being able to say no to people as a weakness, since I have always been very yielding. But now I have become convinced that it is a strength and have therefore made it a habit wherever I go. Almost every day when I hitch-hike, at some point I get invited into a restaurant by a driver. I get the menu but it is impossible for me to choose. After an embarrassingly long pause the driver usually suggests something, and I immediately say yes. I couldn't care less what they serve me. Food is just a means to keep going. I have discovered that even the inability to choose has its advantages when you travel. When I was in the blood bank in New Orleans and as usual fought my way through "the gay wall" out of this town with many gays, on my way up to see the floods in the Mississippi delta I got a lift with a fat antique dealer. He kept pressing me to come with him into the dark woods with promises like "I will put you up with a rich white lady afterwards". I did not want to waste time with another "dirty old man", but couldn't get myself to directly say no. So I ended up letting him follow his lusts out in the woods and true enough, afterwards he drove me to one of the large plan-

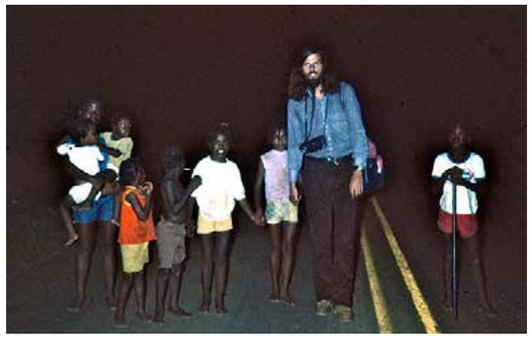


1975 - Notasulga, AL - The woman mentioned in the story who later inspired the Dutch singer Marike Jager to record the album "Celia Trigger"

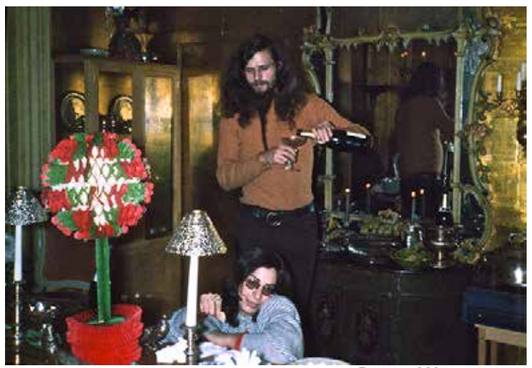


1974 - Harlem, NY -
"Yes, OK", I said, when these children asked to have a picture taken with me - and then suddenly ran off with my camera resulting in a long nightly chase through Harlem. But, YES, eventually we made friends.

1973 - Natchez, MS



1975 - rural Meridian, MS



1973 - Boston, MA

1974 - Norfolk, VA

1974 - New York, NY - with my friend Lee

tation homes in Natchez, where his friend, the owner, Emely Kelley, immediately invited me to equally intimate experiences. I had long ago learned that without saying yes to a little pain, you don't get into heaven. After weeks of hunger, it really felt like getting into heaven to have black servants serve us on silver trays in the canopied beds. Yet it is important to get down to earth again, so when after two weeks I left the mansion, I ended up shacking together that same evening with a black pimp in Greenville, in the poverty-stricken Delta area. We became good friends, and he said that because of our friendship he would give me one of his prostitutes. I didn't say anything. He took me to a bar in which four of his "girls" were standing around. "Choose what-ever pussy you want. You can have it for free," he said. I didn't know what in the world to do. I have come to love such black prostitutes with their fantastic mixture of violent brutality and intense tenderness. You can learn more about society from a black prostitute in one day than from ten university lectures. But it was just impossible for me to choose.*) Then Ed, as he was called, took me home again. From then on he became more open and it turned out that he had put me to a test. He was very interested in the things I had told him, but he had never met a white he could trust, and now wanted to see if I was like the other whites in Mississippi. That night became one of the most intense experiences I had ever had. We both lay in the bed he normally used for his business and all night he told me about his childhood. It all came as a revelation to me. It was the first time I had ever been in Mississippi, and it probably had a particularly strong effect on me because I'd just spent two weeks living in huge plantation homes with those enormous antebellum gowns and gold and glitter everywhere. He told me about the hunger, about how he had had to pick cotton ever since he was five years old for two dollars a day, about how he had never really gone to school because he had to pick cotton, and about all the humiliations he had constantly had to put up with from the whites. Then he just wouldn't take it any more. "Hell no," he repeated again and again. He wanted out of that cotton hell. So he had become a pimp. Both he and his girls agreed that it was better to prostitute themselves in this way than to prostitute themselves in the cotton fields. It is the white man who reaps the profit in both cases, but they made more money this way: fifteen dollars a night per girl. He had studied the white man all his life, every single gesture and thought. He felt that he knew the white man better than he knew himself – and yet he didn't understand him. But his experiences had made him a good pimp, though he was only nineteen years old. He knew precisely how to get white men in contact with his girls. But it hurt him to do it. It left a deep wound. He felt he was selling both his race and his pride; but that he had no choice. He hated the white man with all his heart, but he never dared to show it. That night I came to realize that if many blacks in Mississippi felt like Ed, there would come a day when things would not look good for the whites. I was so shaken after that night that for the next few days I was unable to look whites in the eye. I had been lucky that day in that someone had given me batteries for my tape recorder. I was therefore able to record a lot of what he said that night. Now when I travel around among the whites in Mississippi and live with them I often play that tape for myself in the evening. I want to avoid identifying too strongly with their point of view. With their charming accents and great human warmth, it is hard not to let yourself be seduced. The trick is to keep a cool head in the midst of the boiling witch's-cauldron of the South.

I saw it as a coincidence that Ed opened himself up to me, for I had really felt more like being with the prostitutes. But now I'm beginning to believe it was not just chance. It is as if there is always something that leads me into the right situations.

Letter to an American friend

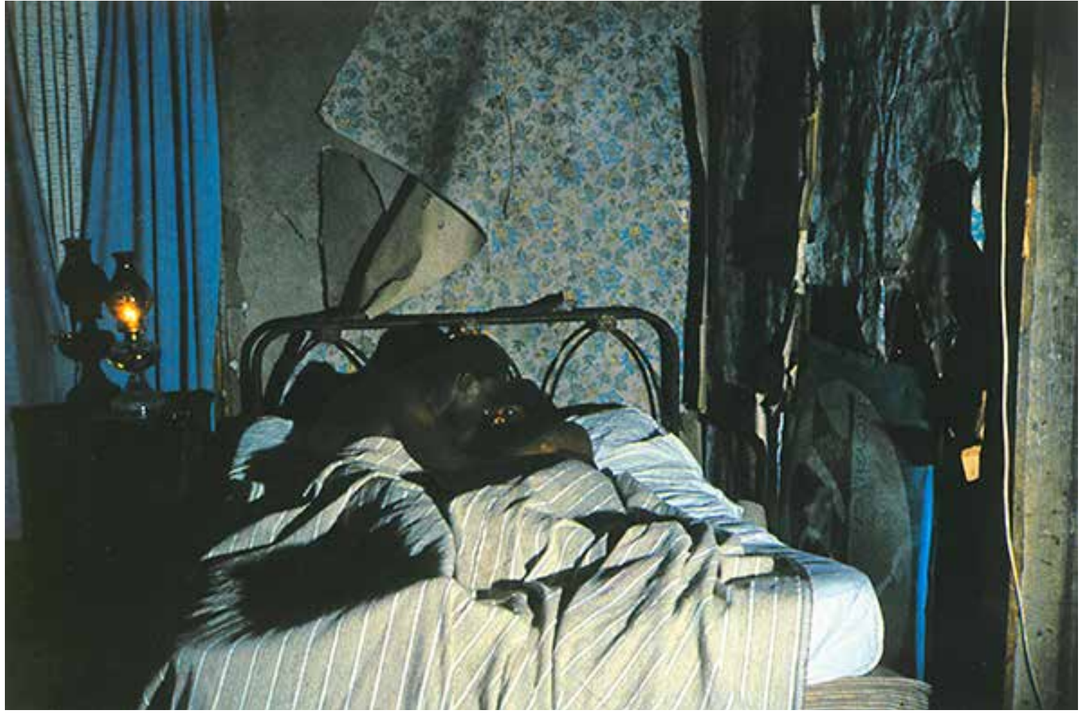
** (I have since found that these (unreflective) unsophisticated sentences from this original letter about my love for prostitutes as an oppressed group, in the U.S. and Britain are often misunderstood in a sexual rather than a political way. For a clearer understanding of my relationship to prostitutes, see page 384).*

1973 - Natchez, MS

1975 - Philadelphia, MS

1996 - Bullock County, AL

1975 - Philadelphia, MS - Polly Jones, who still in 1996 did not have electricity



1974 - Tarboro, NC

1974 - Greenville, NC

The white woman's pedestal - the black woman's cross

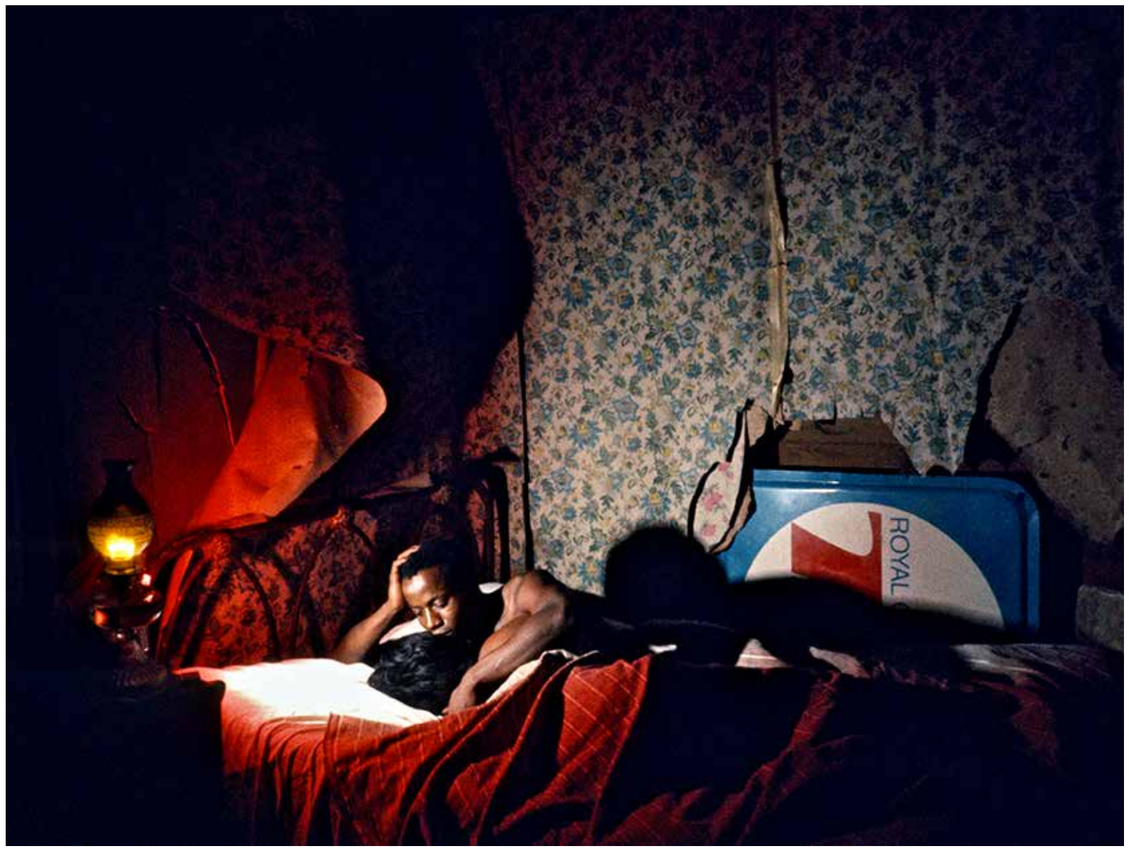
"The appeal to the white man's chivalry is an empty mockery, for it means only the preservation of white womanhood as the emblem of racial purity, and the justification of lynching."
- Ida B. Wells, early civil rights activist

"The white man is the ruler of everything. As the white woman is protected and adored — the Negro woman is the mule of the world."
- Zora Neale Hurston

One of the most peculiar aspects of Southern hospitality is the desire to immediately "give" a male visitor a very attractive "girl." Not only among the old aristocracy but also among the "up-and-coming" millionaires. Seldom had more than a day passed before they supplied me with a "date" from the same class (or, more often, one aspiring to become a member of that class), often without having asked me. When I was living in Mississippi with relatives of Senator Stennis, an arch-conservative, I was given a list of possible belles to choose from. Jack Ray, the Alabama banker, absolutely insisted on giving me Senator Allan's personal secretary for the night.

Their attitude toward "white womanhood" seemed little better than their historical relationship to black womanhood, yet this sacred white womanhood is used as one of the many excuses for the violent suppression of blacks and to instill fear in whites. It's perhaps as hard for real love to thrive under the crystal chandeliers as it is in the glow of the kerosene lamp among those "shacking up together."

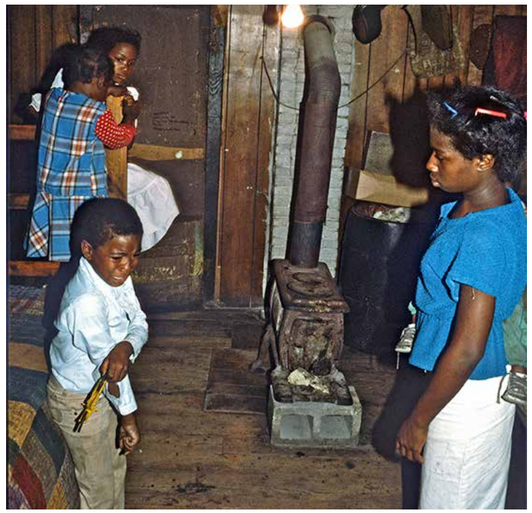
1975 - Las Vegas, NV



1974 - Tarboro, NC

1974 – Spoiled students from the north on their annual spring break in Fort Lauderdale, FL

1996 - Tunica, MS



1990 - Burke County, GA - Below 1973 - Charleston, SC

Perpetuating Historical Oppression through Internalization

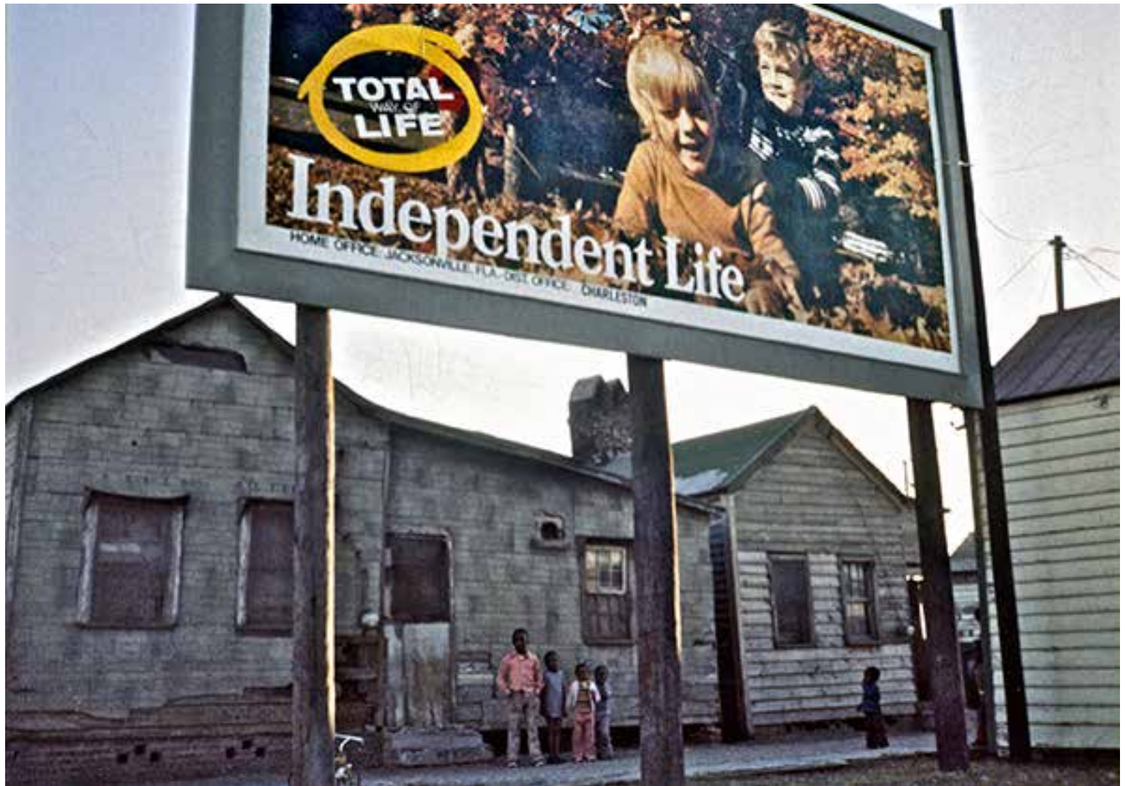
"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." - Steve Biko

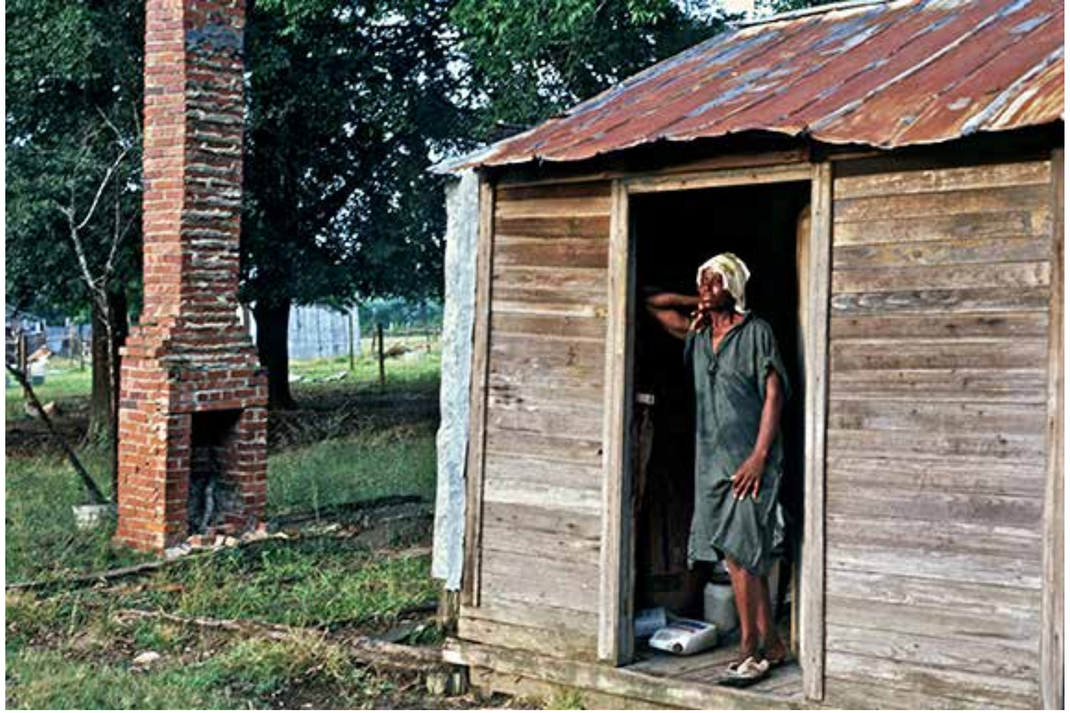
"The greatest weapon used against us is our self-doubt. It is the most insidious, most destructive weapon of all." - Nikki Giovann

No whites, I feel, can fully comprehend the enormous psychological pressure that blacks, constantly bombarded with the message they're worth less than whites, are under. The worst damage occurs when the victim begins to believe the oppressor's prejudices. I frequently hear cruel invalidations, such as "You ain't shit, n-word" reverberating in underclass families. They instill in each other our deep racist feelings for them along with the gloomy prospect of being permanently banished to the shadows of white society. The hope I once found among blacks in the '70s I've since seen being replaced everywhere by self-blame.

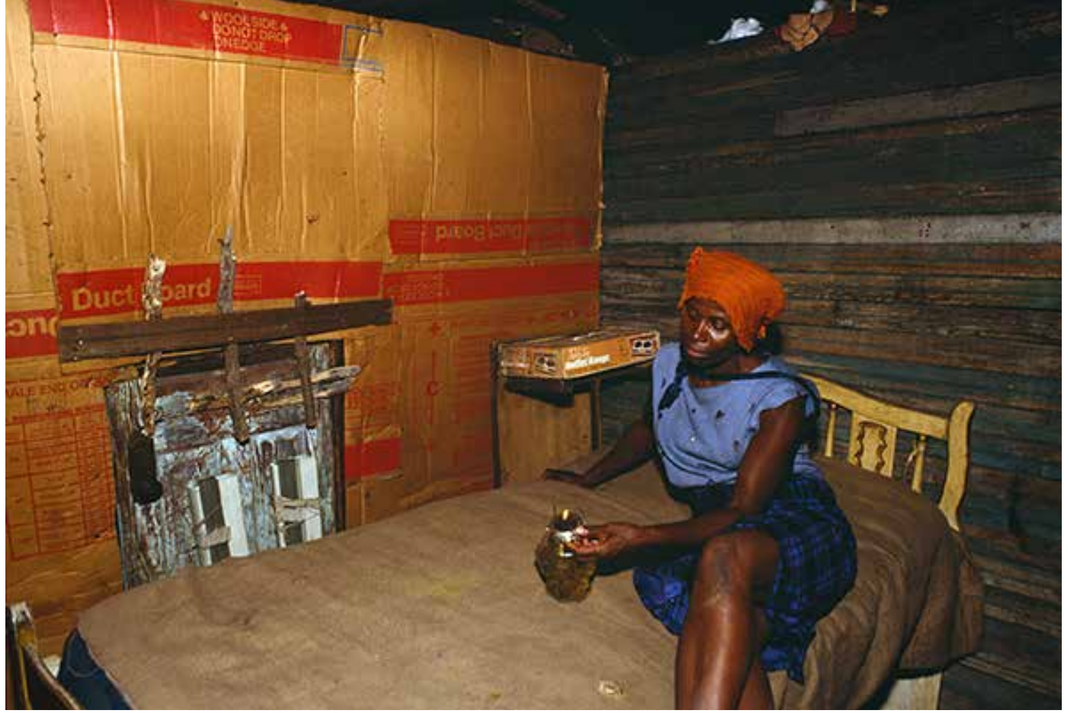
1989 - Bullock County, AL

Below 1990 - Burke County, GA

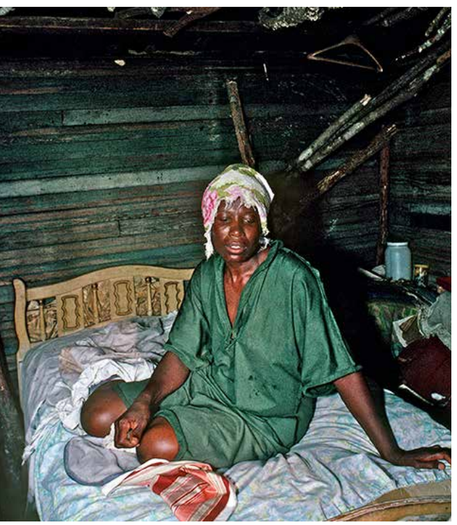




1991 - Montgomery County, AL



1992 - Montgomery County, AL - See my live interview with Wilma below



The demoralizing mirror:

"I have learned that self-doubt is a thief of opportunity, a thief of faith. It kills dreams and creates fear. It is a burden that is lifted only when we choose to believe in ourselves and our abilities." - Oprah Winfrey

Between giving campus lectures in the '90s, I loved the all-night discussions of racial issues I had with Wilma in her little shack. She was well educated but voiced in black words what my white audiences think but dare not say:

- My own kind are holding me down. I am afraid of them. My life is endangered by my own people.
- Have you lost faith in black people?
- Yes, I have, because of the way they have treated me.
- Have whites never caused you any harm?
- Never, in Alabama and New York, I have never had trouble from the whites. Always my own kind of people.
- Do you hold it against them?
- Yes, I do.
- But I told you before you must never forget the real ...
- Yes, you call it internalized oppression, right? But I don't see it that way. I think it's just the nature of them to be that way ...
- No, no, no!
- I don't think it is internalized oppression.
- But you must never lose faith in human beings.
- I have lost faith in them, yes, I have.
- But it all comes from up here, it comes from racism. When people are so hurt, and you know that black people are hurt, they take it out on each other. When you degrade and humiliate people in a country long enough, they eventually turn their anger on each other.
- Yes, but what you are talking about happened back a 100 years ago. I know what you are saying is true, but we have come a long way since then. Doors have opened for us. But we are holding one another back with hatred, selfishness, and whatnot. It is not the whites holding us back now, we are holding each other back.
- Wilma, you're talking the crap of the whites now. That's what they are saying. Who are the employers in this country? They're white, and to whom do they not give work?
- I know, I know, but I can only speak of what I am going through. They are holding me down. My own kind are holding me back.
- That's how all blacks feel these days, and that's why they end up causing each other more harm. When people hate themselves, they take out all this stuff out on each other...
- I know. All I just want is to get away from them.
- Where will you go?
- I don't know yet, but I'm working on it ...

Seeing yourself through the eyes of the oppressor

My live talk with Wilma for a Danish TV-movie in 1992

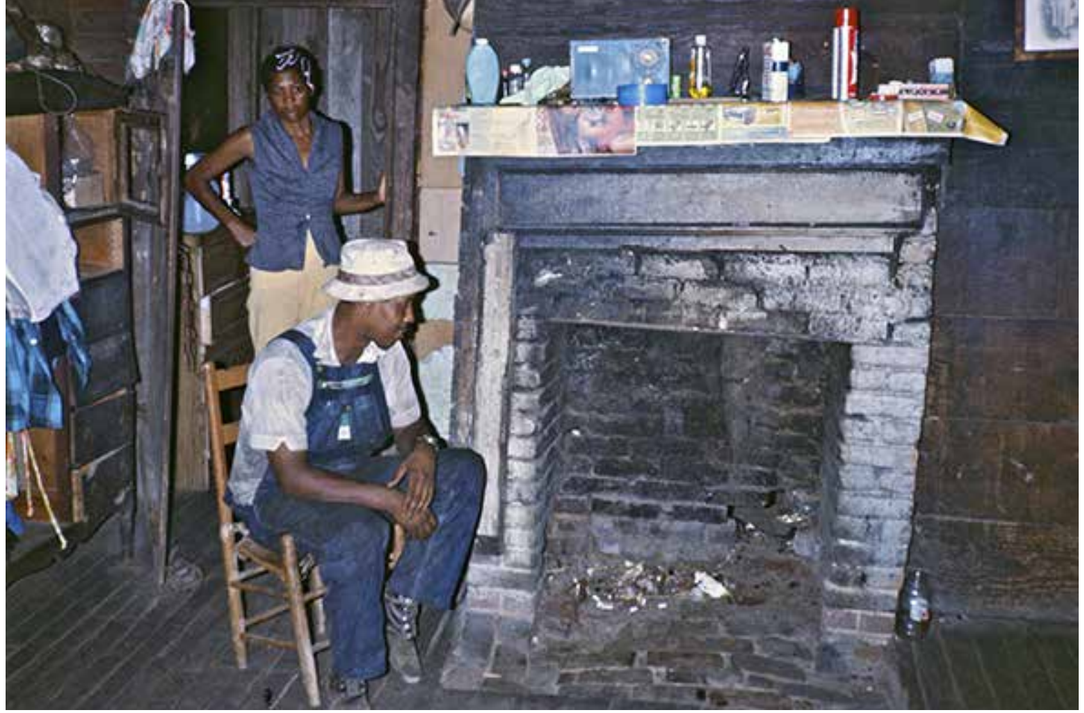
1973 - rural Wendell, NC

The invisible scar: The trauma of racism in body and soul

"Racism is a much more clandestine, much more hidden kind of phenomenon, but at the same time it's perhaps far more terrible than it's ever been." — Angela Davis

After the hope and optimism of the '70s, I would never have believed that racism could worsen so much that I'd one day sit and defend the victims against each other. People can survive oppression if they're able to clearly identify their oppressor and thus avoid self-blame. In the past, this understanding let blacks see light at the end of the tunnel. A hundred years ago whites lived in close physical proximity to blacks. But today we've become so isolated from each other that blacks, whom we ruthlessly bombard with TV fantasies about how free they are, have difficulty identifying their oppressor—a historical first—and therefore look to themselves for the cause of their escalating hopelessness and sense of powerlessness, often leading to depression. Modern concepts of epigenetics suggests that such trauma caused by racism, can be biologically transmitted across generations. And once we succeed in convincing oppressed people that they are their own worst oppressors, everything falls apart. Neither their earnings nor sense of self-worth are great enough to recreate the nuclear family we constantly hold up as the ideal. This sense of hopelessness and failure drives families apart. Nobody feeling good about themselves could oppress another group so devastatingly as we do today. And the victims aren't only the family of the outcast but increasingly the children.

1990 - Burke County, GA



1975 - Bullock County, AL - See Bessie here in video below

How we whites crush with a friendly face

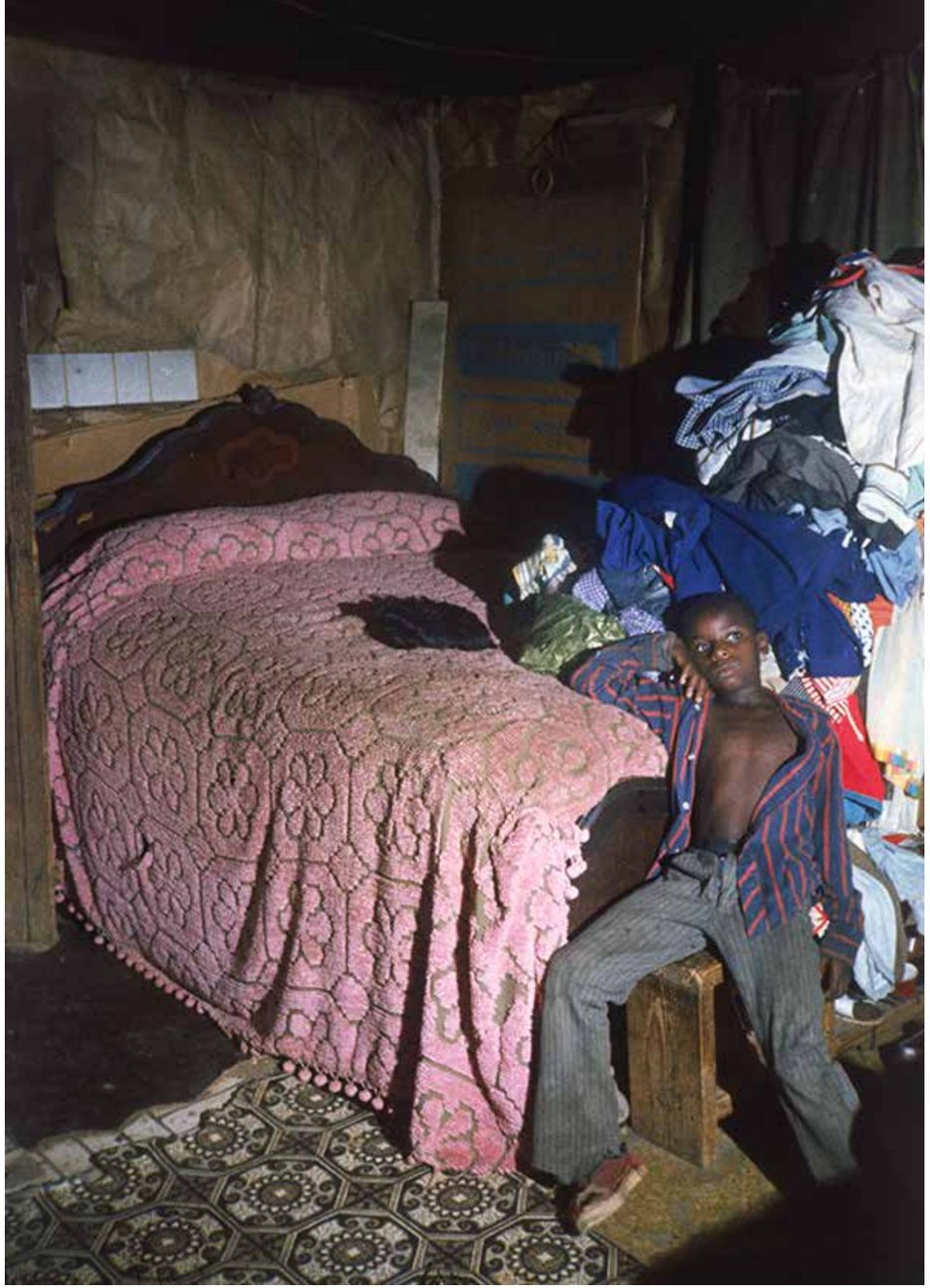
"There are no innocent bystanders in the theatre of oppression." - Audre Lorde

We whites love to talk about having "a black friend here" and "a Muslim friend there" – to gain moral status and recognition from our victims. And we love to denounce the more primitive racism of others but forget that bigots like the KKK and the Nazis are themselves so deeply traumatized and marginalized that have no real power to affect the overall quality of life of blacks in the US or Muslims in Europe.
No, our victims know full well that it is we, the "good" law-abiding citizens, who are today silently forcing millions of our outcasts into ghettos, into psychological isolation and despair. In our white guilt over not being able to live up to our lofty ideals and liberal Christian values, we flee into escapist black TV shows to cover up for our ultimate crushing of the black family. Today more than 70% of black children grow up without a father and one in 10 without either parent—twice as many as when I first came to America and three times as many as under slavery.
It is us, the good, the well-meaning, who maintain the system – precisely because we refuse to see that we are.

"The white liberal is the worst enemy to the black man. He is worse than the Klansman because the Klansman is honest about his intentions. The white liberal is more dangerous because he is more deceptive."
- James Baldwin

1998 - Natchez, MS

Bessie Christian above talking 30 years later about her violent husband who killed her father. Our friendship lasted until her death in 2024

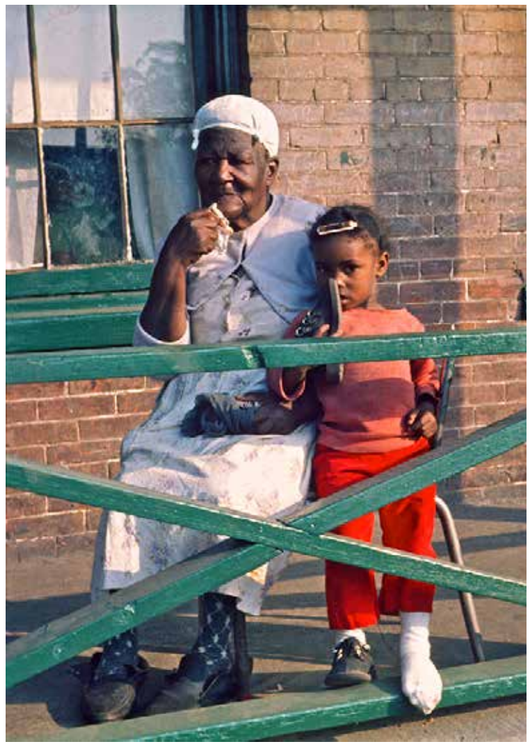


1975 - Philadelphia, MS

1990 - Georgetown County, SC

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

1975 - Notasulga, AL



1974 - Norfolk, VA

1973 - Greensboro, NC

1974 - Washington, NC

Matriarchs of Resilience: The Black Grandmother's Legacy

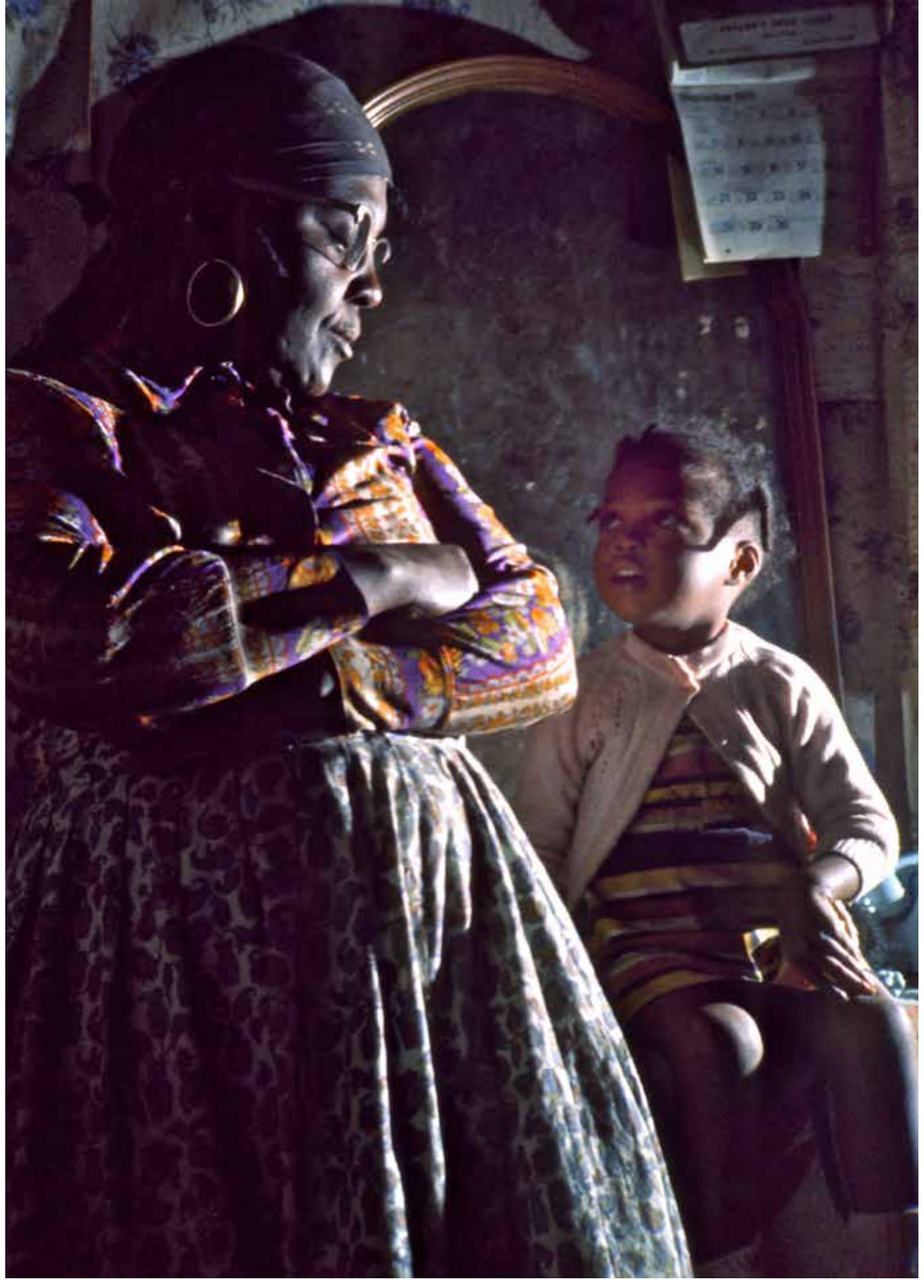
"Grandmothers are the keepers of our history and culture. They are the ones who pass down our traditions and values from generation to generation." - First Lady Michelle Obama

The grandmother therefore has to take care of them. Black students, who are capable of succeeding despite the worst oppression since the slave auctions, often tell me that a grandmother was their saving angel.

Grandma's hands
clapped in church on Sunday morning.
Grandma's hands
played the tambourine so well.
Grandma's hands
used to issue out a warning,
she'd say, Billy don't you run so fast,
might fall on a piece of glass –
might be snakes there in that grass.
Grandma's hands
soothed the local unwed mothers...

Grandma's hands by Bill Withers illustrated in my show with grandmothers

1973 - rural Wendell, NC

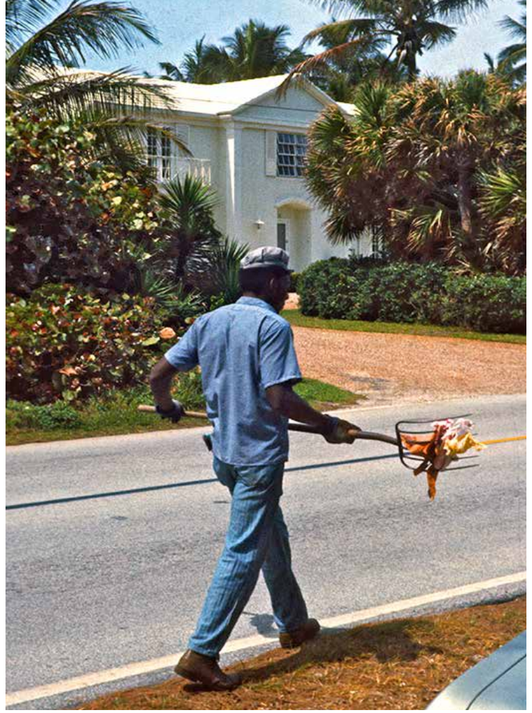


1975 - Waynesboro, GA

1978 - Bullock County, AL

1974 - Palm Beach, FL

Prisoner transport 1974 – and still going strong today, FL



1974 - Palm Beach, FL

1973 – Angola prison, Tunica, LA

From Shackles to Survival:

The Extended Family's Role in Black America

"The black extended family is a network of support and love that has helped us survive centuries of oppression." - Dorothy Height, civil rights fighter and president for The National Council of Negro Women for 40 years

"The black extended family is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. It is a symbol of our ability to overcome adversity and thrive in the face of challenges." – Angela Davis

Even under the most hopeless oppression, people have an unconquerable ability to survive, and so the concept of the extended family as a survival unit has often become the black family's last desperate means of overcoming the effects of a brutal society. But whereas the concept in Africa meant a closely connected family living in the same village, it has in America meant the brutal uprooting and forcible separation of family members over great physical distances.

When liberals excuse the destruction of the black family by talking sympathetically about it as an "inheritance from slavery"—as if the family alone, for no reason, should have carried this legacy on from generation to generation—it's in order to blame an evil system that existed 100 years ago so that they can feel free of responsibility. What I saw over and over again was not the black legacy of slavery, but rather society's legacy of slavery. When the whole system they live in is hardly distinguishable from (and perceived as) slavery, it's clear that the inheritance from slavery is being forced upon the black family.

Many of the missing fathers of these children have over time built the southern highways in chain gangs. Today there are no chains since bloodhounds and submachineguns are far more effective. By following some of the prison trucks, I discovered that, among other things, the prison workers clean up around the mansions and the private beaches of the richest people in the world in Palm Beach. These photos are from S. Ocean Boulevard outside Trump's Mar-a-Lago. As president he implemented the largest tax cut in US history, helping billionaires pay less in TOTAL taxes than many workers.

To work here under the guns of white overseers can hardly be perceived by the black consciousness as anything but a direct continuation of the slave work formerly carried out around the large white plantation homes. In 2022, state legislators proposed bills to abolish this "slavery or involuntary servitude" from Florida's constitution, but did not gain broad support. Just as the chattel slaves found it justifiable to steal to survive the hardships forced upon them, many of today's prisoners justify crime as necessary to survive the poverty these white millionaires have forced on them. The wealthy's active reverse class struggle has meant a regressive redistribution of money from the poor to the rich, away from the relative economic equality I witnessed in the '70s. When it's a fact that blacks everywhere in America get much longer sentences than whites for similar offenses, the perception of slavery becomes a concrete reality. Blacks often receive a life sentence for charges of which whites would've been acquitted. The many thousands who suffer from this forced legacy of slavery can in a sense be called our political prisoners.

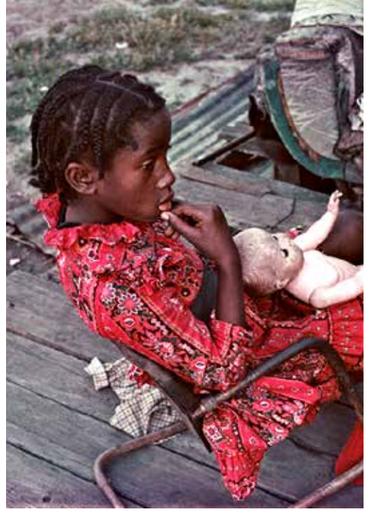
1974 - Palm Beach, FL

Historical photo of prisoners in chains

1974 - Palm Beach, FL

1974 - Palm Beach, FL

1974 - Palm Beach, FL - Begging among billionaires



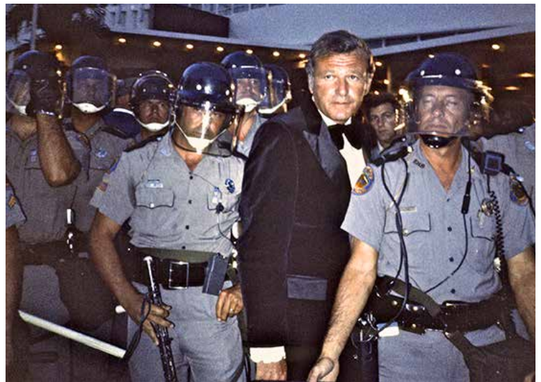
Widening the Gap: Inequality's 50-Year March

"They talk about trickle-down economics, but it never trickles down / All I see is mansions while the people stuck in the ground" - Jay-Z, rapper

I find most of my friends in this book in a relatively worse situation today than when I first met them. But here on Palm Beach and Miami Beach with America's wealthiest families are people whom Reagan's, Bush's and Trump's tax cuts made even richer. Until a few years ago, blacks (apart from servants) weren't allowed to set foot here—and they're often arrested if they do.

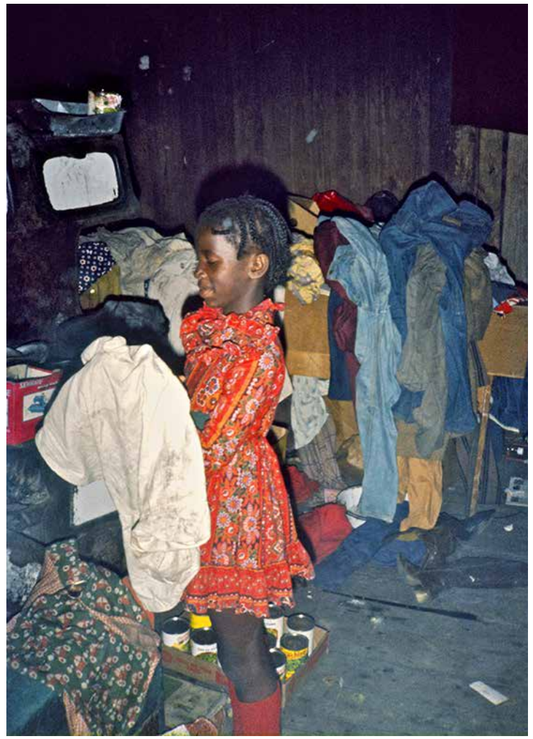
Occasionally, however, a beggar gets in and gets a penny from the multimillionaires. It's also here that America's presidents play golf on some of the finest courses in the world—and use black caddies, whom I saw them pay less than $5–$6 dollars an hour. And it's here that these black slave workers can see white millionaires sitting in their Rolls Royces reading the latest quotes from Wall Street.
Nevertheless, I also found a leftist millionaire, Bill Gandall, with whom I spent some amusing days and who let me borrow his Mercedes so I could follow the prison slaves in this money hell. If you use inmates to work for you, you must of course also have the police by your side. When you've killed love and trust in society, all the TV cameras and electronic surveillance equipment in the world aren't enough. It would be horrifying to have your children kidnapped; better to lock them up in a cold isolated world, like Tania and her little sister here, and have a Cuban nanny take care of them. And for busy career parents, it's probably easier to turn their kids into slaves of TV than to let them see the world outside, where, only a few miles away, Linda and her family lived

1972 - Miami Beach, FL



1974 - Palm Beach, FL with Bill Gandall

1974 - Miami Beach, FL

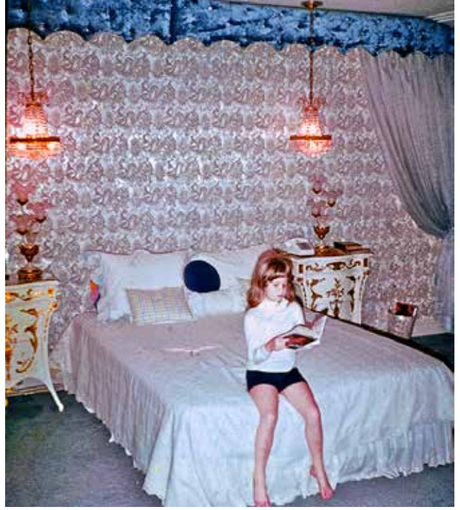


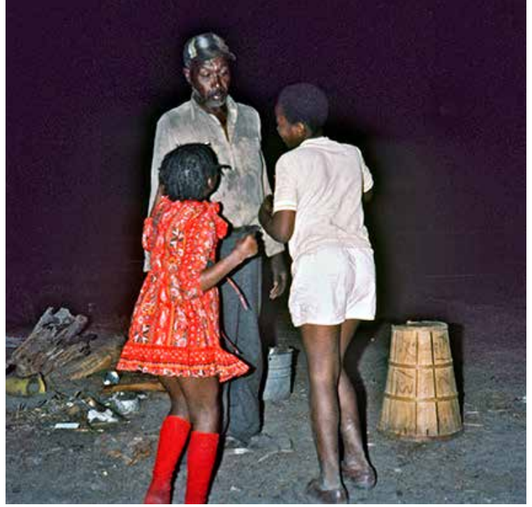
1974 - La Crosse, FL

1974 - Miami Beach, FL

1974 - Miami Beach, FL

1974 - La Crosse, FL





1974 - Miami Beach, FL

1974 - La Crosse, FL

The Flame of Black Resilience: a Story of Hope

"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly." – Langston Hughes

Linda lived not too far from Disney World, but I shouldn't say that too loudly since she's never had the money to go there. So poor were they at Linda's that they rarely had light before I moved in with them. I had a little millionaire money with me so I could buy kerosene for their old lamp. It was a day of rejoicing for the family. Linda's father worked from early morning to late night taking care of cows for a white land-owner and, after a three-mile walk, often on bare feet, he didn't get home before 10 pm. But this evening we wanted to delight him with a surprise, and when we saw him coming in the darkness, Linda ran out and leaped into his arms shouting: "Dad, Dad, we got a present ... see? See? Light! We got light!"
Afterwards, Linda and her brother danced outside in the glow of the lamp. There was such joy over that light that it warmed me immensely, especially right after my experience of a succession of cold millionaire homes. For the most part, though, I didn't find much to be happy about. Food always had to be cooked over an outdoor fire, and Linda's mother could only sit motionlessly all day in the same chair because of the painful disease she suffered from. Linda had to do her homework before sunset, but sometimes I saw her reading in moonlight. Often, hours passed while she read to me on the bed.

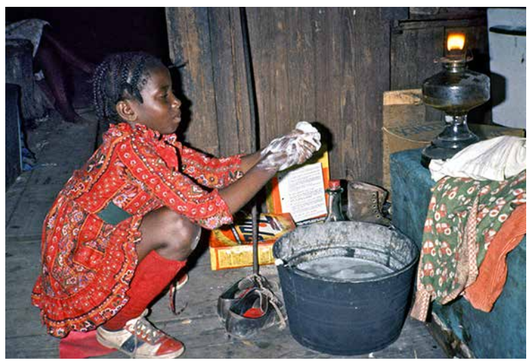
"Hope is the thing that makes you keep going when everything around you is telling you to give up." — Jacqueline Woodson, "Brown Girl Dreaming"

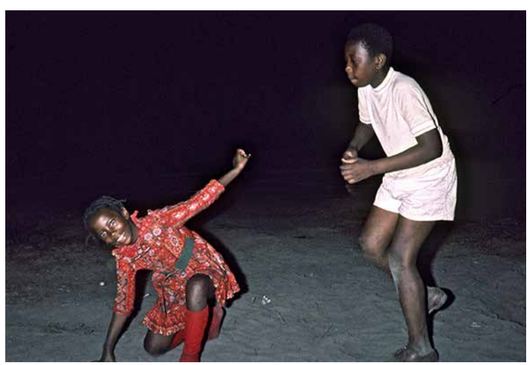
For me, Linda was without comparison my brightest and most encouraging experience in America. I came to her family at a time when I was deeply depressed and discouraged after months of traveling through the poverty of the black South, which I felt was more destructive and dehumanizing than any other poverty in the world.

I looked at Linda and wondered why she hadn't been subdued in spirit and body as had so many other poor black children I'd met in the underclass. What was it that enabled her family to stay together in the midst of this inhuman existence? And why did they have a deeper love for each other than I'd found in any other home I'd been to in America?
To be in Linda's home was like stepping into a Hollywood movie romanticizing poverty.

While poverty everywhere in America is hideous and gives both people and their surroundings a repulsive face, here it had let love survive. That experience, to find love in the midst of a world of ugliness, was so indescribable and shocking that I was totally overwhelmed.

1974 - Miami Beach, FL





Now that we found love
what are we gonna do with it?
Let's give it a chance
let it control our destiny.
We owe it to ourselves
to live happy eternally.

Oh, love is what we've been hoping for,
and love is what we've been searching for.
Now that I've got it right here in my hand,
I'm gonna spread it all over the land.

Now that we found love
what are we gonna do with it?
Let's forgive and forget
let no thought be your enemy.
I never felt so good,
I'm as happy, happy, happy
as a man could be.
Love is what we've been waiting for,
love is what we've been hoping for.
Now that I got it right here in my hand
I'm gonna spread it all over the land...

The song by The O'Jays illustrated with more photos of Linda

1974 - Miami Beach, FL

1975 - Troy, AL

1974 - La Crosse, FL

"If One Is Truly to Succeed in Leading a Person to a Specific Place, One Must First and Foremost Take Care to Find Him Where He Is and Begin There. This is the secret in the entire art of helping. Anyone who cannot do this is himself under a delusion if he thinks he is able to help someone else. In order truly to help someone else, I must understand more than he – but certainly first and foremost understand what he understands. If I do not do that, then my greater understanding does not help him at all. If I nevertheless want to assert my greater understanding, then it is because I am vain or proud. But All true helping begins with a humbling."
Søren Kierkegaard in "On My Works as an Author" 1859

"Jeg debatterer ikke. Jeg engagerer mig. Jeg debatterer ikke had; jeg afvæbner det. Hvis du kommer ind med skydevåben, vil du kun få den anden side til at komme tilbage med skydevåben. Men hvis du kommer ind med et åbent sind og en vilje til at lytte, føler de sig bekræftet. Det handler ikke om at ændre verden. Det handler om at ændre et hjerte ad gangen." - Daryl Davis, en sort mand, der blev ven med KKK og omvendte dens medlemmer, fra hans bog "Klan-destine Relationships - a Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan"

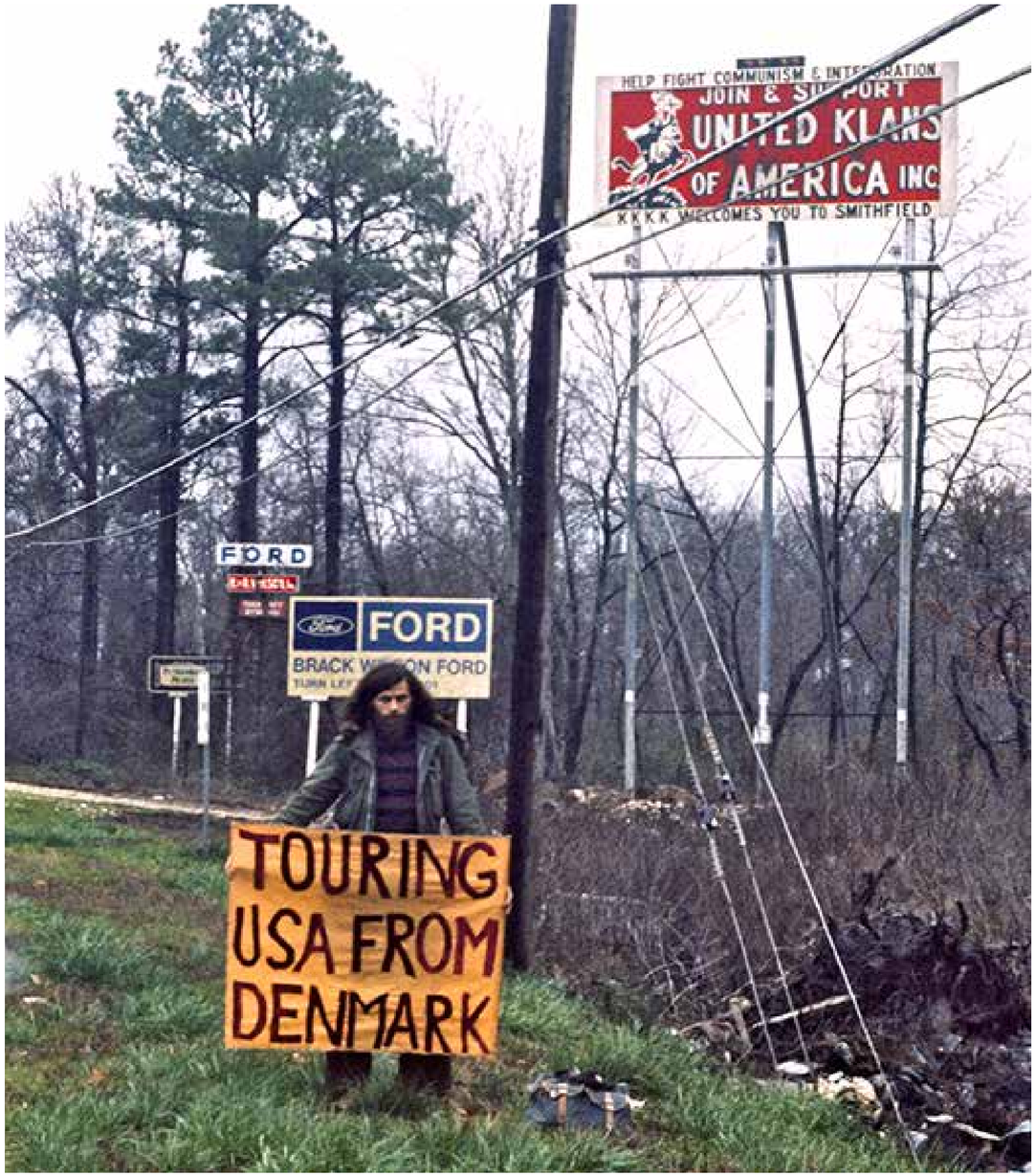
Intermedium

Understanding...

The roots of white hate

In my vagabond years, I couldn't understand or even see white hate, but saw and photographed its trail of destruction everywhere. For the same reason, my inner thinking was overwhelmingly negative toward hateful whites, such as the Ku Klux Klan, who thus never opened up to me. All I could see were their billboards, which were raised up high on steel bars since blacks burned them down all the time.
However, armed with the love I received from the students over 30 years of workshops—showing them the destruction their own "innocent" racism caused, while they in turn opened their hearts to me, revealing the pain behind it—suddenly, after 9/11, it all started affecting my relationship to a group that had been invisible to me. They now came from all over and took me by the hand to show me their world of pain. Here are the stories of some of my new friends and the wise words of my old inspirator:

"Mørke kan ikke uddrive mørke; kun lys kan gøre det. Had kan ikke uddrive had; kun kærlighed kan gøre det." – Martin Luther King



1974 - Smithfield, NC

Understanding the roots of white hate: Can we love the Ku Klux Klan?

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." - Nelson Mandela

"The focus on the Klan also helped to designate racism as an individual aberration rather than something systemic, institutional, and pervasive."
Carol Anderson, White Rage

Love them? For 25 years, I'd been mouthing empty rhetoric in American universities about embracing the Klan—not always easy for black and Jewish students—but never giving a thought to putting the words into deeds, to "walk the talk." As usual we need a helping hand to integrate with those we fear or despise, for how could I "embrace" without joining? Or, as I jokingly say in my lectures, "How I became a card-carrying member of the Klan?"

Here's how, for a declared "antiracist," the unthinkable happened. Danish TV wanted to make a movie about my work in America and got the crazy idea to put me face to face with Jeff Berry, America's biggest and most hateful Klan leader. "Ok with me if I am not on the lecture circuit. I've dealt with plenty of racist students, and I can't image that a Klan leader can be any worse," I said. But on the day we were to fly to Klan headquarters in Indiana, a lecture in Maine had been moved because of snow. So instead they set the camera up in New York and said, "Say something to the Klan leader that we can show him." What do you say to a Klan leader when you're surrounded by blacks and Jews in New York? I started telling him about all the poor white "children of pain" I'd picked up over the years, who'd told me about endless childhood beatings or sexual abuse, and how they'd grown up to join the Klan or similar groups. And how their stories of mistreatment seemed so similar to what I'd seen in many underclass blacks. To tease the Klan leader, I even had the audacity to compare angry ghetto blacks with the Klan, "and therefore feel the same compassion for you in the Klan as for my black friends." When he saw the video, he was so moved that he immediately sent me an open invitation. (His wife later told me that I'd hit, dead center, the deepest layers of pain from his childhood of abuse.)

Well, I usually had university lectures every day and no time to meet him. But the next year, my lecture agent, Muwwakkil, owed me so much money that I fired him (for a while), and he cancelled 41 lectures in revenge. I remember how relieved I was to have all this freedom to join real people instead of lecturing students about them. I called Muwwakkil, who is black, and teased, "Ok, then I'll join the Klan to get you to pay up."

In the meantime, Jeff Berry had been sentenced (at first) to 30 years in prison, so how could I take a meaningful vacation? Well, I moved in with his wife, Pamela, who was now functioning Klan leader. When I saw that her bed was as messy as the beds of other poor whites—membership cards all over it—I helped her clean up and for fun asked, "If I write myself on one of those cards, will I become a member of the Klan?" To my surprise she burst out enthusiastically, "Yes, please do. We've never had an antiracist as a member. It would mean so much to us." And the next day, she proudly called her husband to tell him how they'd now recruited an antiracist. Again, I'd learned how easy it is to join or integrate with any group when you approach them with empathy and love rather than antagonism or hate. But could I change them now that I was no longer a passive observing photographer but a committed antiracist activist?

2002 - Butler, IN. Helping Pamela to clean up her messy bedroom

2002 - My first Sunday dinner with Grand Dragon Jean and Dennis

What I learned living with the Klan on and off over the next years belongs in another book. Here are just a few highlights. I conducted long video interviews with Pamela about the sexual abuse she'd suffered through as a child, and she related how Jeff had endured such terrible beatings in his "dysfunctional family" that he ran away from home as a child and lived since then on the street as a "hustler." Jeff told me in prison how he'd been neglected and unloved by his mother, a heroin addict and prostitute. "But today she's a fine lady after a black customer married her and saved her out of all that abuse. I love my stepfather for it."

Pamela kept telling me there was no hate in Jeff— "he has lots of black friends ... I just don't like it when he speaks rhetorically hateful things about faggots in our meetings. For myself, I still feel deeply hurt by the loss of my best friend, a black woman, when I joined the Klan."

Everyone in the Klan loved me and they started inviting Grand Dragons from other states to Sunday dinner with "our new antiracist member." Interviewing them, I found the same pattern of deep abuse in childhood. A year after my dinner with Grand Dragon Jean and her official bodyguard, Dennis (Dennis was so proud to be bodyguard for his own wife), I came out to visit them in their poor house in Illinois. When she saw me, she came running out to embrace me. "Jacob, Jacob, I'm so glad to see you again. Dennis just died from a heart attack. I'm a free woman now." She dragged me right into their bedroom and undressed completely for me. True, she'd taken a photo of me the year before proposing to Pamela—on my knees, red roses in hand, and dressed in a Klan suit—acting out my philosophy of "going to bed with the enemy," but I was still shocked.

Luckily, Grand Dragon Jean just wanted to show me how her breasts and genitals and

Klan leader's granddaughter swept in the symbols of hate

2003 - Love between a Nazi and a KKK

entire body were now covered with tattoos. To her, that's what it was to "be a free woman" now that Dennis had died. Why? I have long tapes of interviews with him about the vicious beatings he got as a child from his violent drunk stepfather covered with tattoos. And that tattooed arm beating him endlessly had been such a nightmare that he refused to let Jean get tattoos. "But you understand, Jacob, that you're not a real Klan woman unless you proudly wear the Klan insignias on your most private parts," Jean declared. She was the official seamstress of the Klan's colorful robes and wanted to make me one "for only $80 because of our long friendship." I called them "clown suits," which always cracked them up since they knew very well that all the KKK is about today is clowning for the rest of us in these historical costumes in a desperate attempt to get a little attention. That they dressed in the borrowed feathers of hate I also felt when their two parrots kept me awake all night screaming, "White Power!" I didn't hear them as screams of racism, but as two deeply oppressed birds who'd all their lives perched next to the answering machine and internalized its message, which I soon heard as "poor white trash power"—a cry for help from a deeply ostracized group of Americans who've never in any meaningful way felt part of the white-power structure from which other whites benefit. When I since saw my naïve Klan friends duped into believing that Trump, a billionaire, would save them, I understood how abused and exploited they are.

The parrots are talking in a hateful and foul language.

I saw many examples of how they feel hurt and bewildered when we call them "hateful". They kept warning me about going over to visit Wally, a Nazi who'd married the Klan leader's daughter, Tania, "for the Nazis are full of hate" (unlike us). Again, I see this trend, how we humans need to see some people as worse than ourselves to keep morally aloof and justify our own perceived innocent racist thinking. Yet, after just one night of talking with Wally, I found the pain in his life. He told me he'd been happily married in New York, but one day saw his wife and daughter, caught in the crossfire between black street gangs, killed by stray bullets. He went berserk and joined the Nazis. A short time later, he saw the Klan leader and his daughter on the Jerry Springer show, fell in love with her, and drove all the way to Indiana to propose. Being married to Tania was how, my Klan friends said, "we got a scumbag Nazi into our proud Klan," which made them feel deeply ashamed. Jeff told me in prison how infuriated he was that in his absence Wally and Tania had taken over the Klan's radio station "so that all Americans now think we're about hate, not justice and civil rights for whites."

I took lots of pictures of Wally hailing Hitler with his new daughter, Kathrin, but didn't worry about her being brainwashed to become a vicious racist because I saw how spoiled she was by parental love. Wally was so afraid of losing his new daughter he refused to work, spending all his time with Kathrin. Day after day I saw him sit and read children's books to her, and over the years I watched as she entered high school and became a warm healthy woman, unlike so many in the Klan, who were abused or had grown up unloved.

My long and ongoing friendship with the Klan gave me a good chance to test them, just as I'm sure they tested me. I tested them on their feelings about blacks, immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, Jews, etc. Muslims: "Good God-fearing people" (well, that was before Trump popularized Islamophobia). Only homosexuals were vilified by some, like Jeff, but when I changed the question to "What would you say if your own child was gay?" they usually said, "Oh, then I'd love them like my other children"—an answer I didn't get from most Republicans at the time. On some issues, like capital punishment, they were farther left than most Americans. The most anti-Semitic thing I heard was from Jean. One day she asked me whether I believed in the Holocaust. I sensed that she'd read some of the wild Holocaust denials on the Internet and gave her a long lecture. She was clearly relieved to hear my answer and since then they called me – a high school dropout – "the professor."

When I started lecturing in Denmark about how I saw less hate in the Klan than in the Danes and their attitudes toward immigrants, an angry black woman stood up and said, "Jacob, my mother took me to see American Pictures when I was 14, and you were my big hero then. I walked around with a t-shirt saying, "Bomb the Klan." But now I must say you're out of your mind." To this woman, Rikke Marrot, now 34, I said, "I can hear you have some prejudice against the Klan, and as you know from my lecture, if you have prejudice against somebody, there's only one thing you can do: heal your hate by moving in with them to see them as human beings.

Why don't you come with me to America and move in with the Klan? Then you can bomb them all you want. I promise to photograph it." Rikke took sick leave from her modelling job to come with me. It was my chance to put both her and the Klan to a test. I knew what would happen; they ended up loving each other, and she later wrote a book about how she as a black didn't find any hate in the Klan—at least not as much as in the Danes. I loved taking videos when she entertained the Klan by talking about how her "black family killed hundreds of whites." Even though she said it was her Maasai tribe during the Mau Mau Uprising, the uneducated Klan understood it only in a black-and-white American context and sat in speechless admiration of the courageous black warrior who'd entered their lives. "I want to meet our new black member so I can impress the 5,000 blacks I'm surrounded by here in the prison," Jeff Berry said. So we spent 11 hours driving to the prison only to find that they wouldn't let Rikke in. Pam and Rikke stood hugging each other in tears of disappointment. When Rikke experienced the deep love between Pam and Jeff, she decided to do something about it with me.

2003 - Wally while he to the regret of Jeff had taken over the KKK to spread hate

2002 - Klan leader's granddaughter being taught

2003 - Black and white love in the Ku Klux Klan

Here's why it's important to move in with those you have prejudice against. If I hadn't lived with Pamela, I wouldn't have overheard a phone conversation between her and a neighbor during which I suddenly realized Jeff was innocent of the crime he was in prison for. It was actually his own violent son, always in bar brawls, who'd threatened someone with a gun while arguing with some hostile journalists. Nothing would've happened if my friends in the Southern Poverty Law Center hadn't eventually heard about it. They do an admirable job of keeping an eye on all the hate groups in America, a job I'd long supported. They charged Jeff's son with "attempted kidnapping," but Jeff couldn't face the prospect of his son going to prison, so he confessed to the crime. And when you're a Klan leader in America, you can easily be sentenced to up to 30 years in prison even though there were no witnesses, no one was injured, and Jeff had never been convicted of a violent crime.

When Rikke and I learned that he was in prison for love and not for hate, we, along with his black attorney, mounted an enormous defense for him. We ran to lawyers and justices and local papers, and I started writing defense pleas on the Internet, calling one "Romeo and Juliet in Klan Hoods." The whole time I teased Rikke, "Hey, I thought you came to bomb the Klan, not to liberate their leader."
Our combined efforts succeeded, and Jeff was freed. Deeply grateful for his "antiracist" savior, he took me around to meet all his poor local friends. Sadly, he'd lost his job and since on my prison visits I'd told him how I let black dealers I knew in the ghettos sell my book as an alternative to selling drugs, he said, "Jacob, can't I sell your book too?" And this is how I got America's biggest Klan leader to drive around selling my antiracist book. He laughed as much as I did at the irony, but why not, we asked, join up with the creatures God sends us to make a little money and have a little fun?

And when I saw how the Klan's primitive website had been totally neglected during Jeff's absence, I got his permission to be the Klan's official webmaster and free hand to change it. To my surprise, I found hardly any hate I had to throw out (only toward pedophiles). I now understood the background for this, so I let them keep it because we all have a need to hate something when we're in pain. As I said to my black and Jewish friends, "Now you have me as your guarantee that there will be nothing racist or anti-Semitic on the Klan's website. You only get such power over the Klan by empowering them with love and affection. If you attack them with hate and prejudice, they'll only make themselves worse to live up to the role of the 'bad guys'—the negative attention they always sought in their deep self-hate."

It seemed like I could do nothing wrong now, and the Klan started organizing wild parties for me whenever I came by on the lecture circuit—usually bringing highly

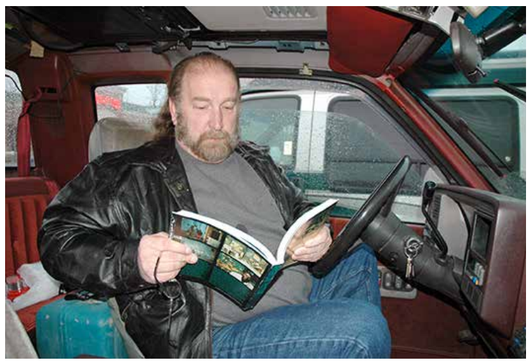
Jeff is the only KKK-leader ever to march in Manhattan as seen here.

... So why not try to appease such a provocative Klan leader?

educated antiracist activists with me to help them out of their blind hate for the KKK. It wasn't difficult when we were sometimes greeted by the Klan leader with, "Oh, damn Jacob, why'd you come so late? You would've loved the wild party we had last night. We had so many of your black and Mexican friends partying with us, even some of the local Amish people came..." Finally, thanks to our long friendship, I wanted to put Jeff to the ultimate test by taking him around America to meet all my old black friends mentioned in this book. I knew how he'd react, but I invited a Danish TV reporter with me as a witness and to help get Danish school kids out of their endless "worshipping the devil" education and start taking responsibility for the racism in themselves rather than seeing the beam in their brother's eye.

There was just one problem I hadn't foreseen. In private I'd never found any deep racism in Jeff, but he, like all Klansmen, knew full well that if they were themselves no one would go on cultivating them as "the evil people"—the only role in which they could get a little attention and world fame. So whenever the camera-man put his lens on Jeff, Jeff started in on all his ridiculous Klan rhetoric. This blew me away. He'd

An example from my time as official web designer for the Ku Klux Klan



The Klan leader on the road selling my anti-racist book

We spent a whole day driving to see Jeff in the prison where the Klan leader wanted to impress his many new black friends with Rikke.

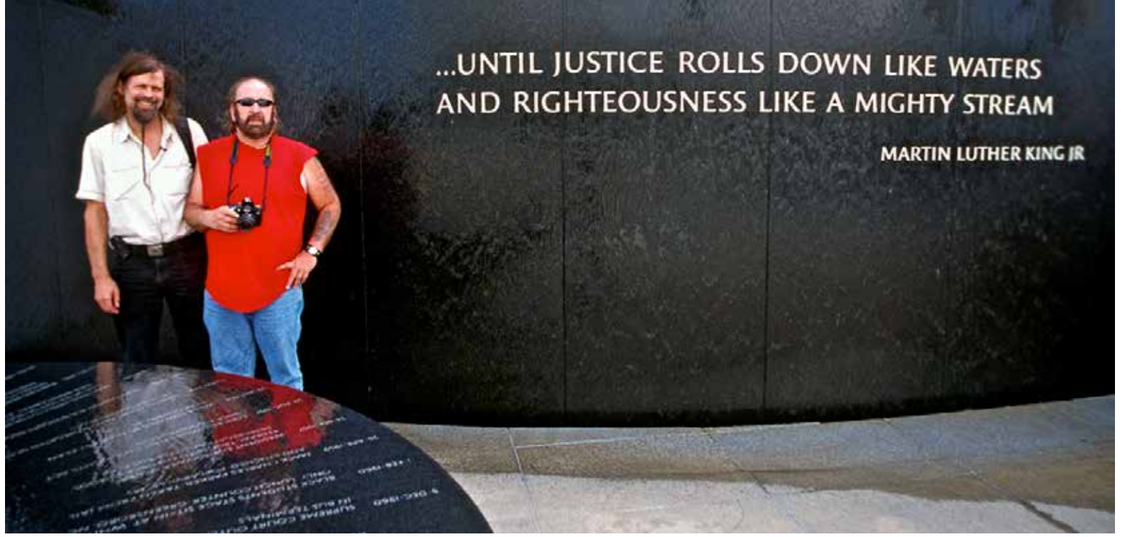
never talked like this in private or among his Klan friends. And what shocked me even more was that he now forced me into the opposite role, playing the great antiracist (also so as not to lose face for the TV viewers). We both ended up hating the media for always selling hate and division and for almost destroying our friendship. In private Jeff loved meeting my black friends, such as Mary, [page 130] whose house was firebombed by racists, and Virginia Pate [page 44], the elderly widow I'd stayed with in the swamps.

And the respect was mutual. When we came to Virginia Honore, [page 37] whom I'd known since she was 16 and we'd flirted with each other, and who'd now married Howard, a prison guard in Angola, Jeff had been driving so much that he'd fallen asleep and was napping in the car. So while we were sitting on the front porch chatting, I suddenly said to Virginia, "I've always known you as a caring Christian who can forgive anybody. But what if I one day brought a Ku Klux Klan leader?" She said, "You know I'll love him as much as God's other children. It's never mattered what friends you've brought with you to my shack over the years—multimillionaires, like Anita Roddick, or the poorest drifters to give them a shower." I said, "Well, I actually have America's biggest, most hated Klan leader with me this time." I got off the porch and woke Jeff up. Without batting an eyelash, Virginia went into the house to get him something to eat and drink. It was an unforgettable evening with laughter and long discussions, during which, to my surprise, they agreed on almost everything (from a moral standpoint), such as their opposition to mixed marriages. "Jenny," Virginia called, "come out here and hear it from a Klansman himself that it's wrong for you to date your white boyfriend. It'll hurt the children to grow up mulatto." And certainly, they both believed nothing good could come out of prison or capital punishment. Virginia and Howard had once adopted a 16-year-old boy to keep him away from crime, but he committed a vicious murder, and now it was Howard's job to lead his adopted son to his execution. (Howard also acted as a stand-in in the movie Dead Man Walking.)

Jeff received a loving and forgiving reception among all my black friends—even when I brought him to the congregation of my ex-father-in-law's old shack-church in Philadelphia, MS, the town famous for the Ku Klux Klan's killing of three civil rights workers, dramatized in the film Mississippi Burning. I've always believed in and practiced bringing people together as the best way of helping them out of their fear and demonization. Certainly, it made a deep and lasting impression on a Klan leader to meet all this forgiveness from blacks, just as Jeff and I had affected each other through our long friendship.

Still, I hadn't expected it to be that easy to help a leader out of the Klan (that had never been the purpose of my involvement), yet shortly after the trip, Jeff dissolved his entire Klan group. He'd been in the KKK his whole life. It had been his whole identity and only claim to world fame, but it made no sense for him anymore. What happened next shocked me. Some of the members, including his own son, whom he'd saved from prison, got so furious they tried to kill

Left: Jeff meeting Virginia and Howard in the TV-movie "Jacob and the Klan"
Right: See full movie to the right



I drove 24 hours with the klan leader to show him the Civil Rights monument in Montgomery with the 41 names of people killed by Klan violence

Jeff. He was so badly beaten he was in coma for two months and his doctors doubted he would live. When he woke up, he was blind and handicapped for life. But when I came to see him and Pamela, they were so happy that they gave me their own bed. Now he was preaching love in a church rather than hate in the woods. I saw no difference from the old Jeff to the new. It just made more sense now for him to search for the attention he craved so much by using light instead of darkness—the holy cross rather than the burning cross. The deep love inside him had, ever since the abuse he'd suffered in childhood, been so crippled and imprisoned that we, looking in from outside, had mistaken it for hate.

The Klan leader with Virginia and Howard known from "Dead man walking"

2007 - With Jeff, now paralyzed and blind for life.

Understanding the roots of white hate: Love disguised as hate - I.

.....or why the KKK is so easy to dismantle

"The Klan's legacy is still alive. We gotta dismantle it, not just condemn it." - Killer Mike, rapper

"We can't dismantle white supremacy without dismantling the KKK, both in its physical form and its ideological form." - Ibram X. Kendi

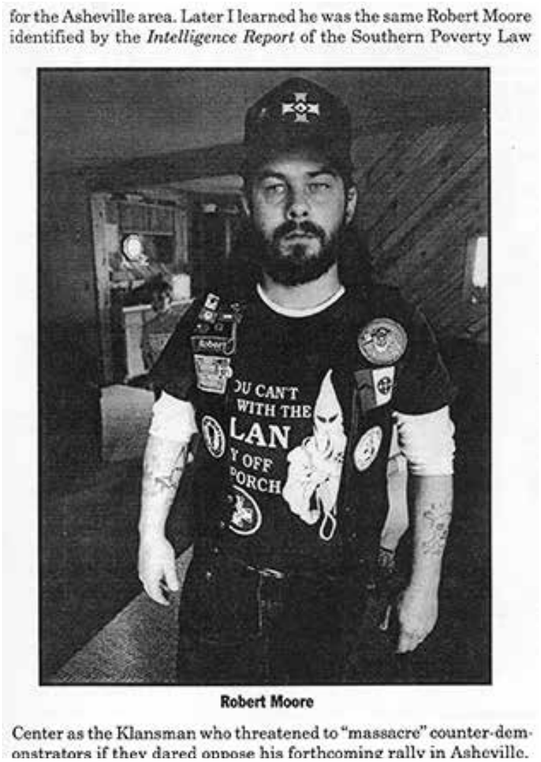
In books about the KKK, Robert Moore is described as one of the most dangerous Grand Dragons in the US. He threatened that "his Klansmen would open fire to massacre counterdemonstrators if they dared to oppose" his rallies, "and God forbid if there's any children there." I grant that such inflammatory language can be dangerous for weak souls, so when I met Robert at a party at Klan headquarters, I was curious to find out what he was made of. Certainly this small fat timid and taciturn man could look scary with all his hateful tattoos, but, I thought, never judge people by their appearances; see what they hold in their hearts (all those layers of beer fat notwithstanding). I got my chance while we were drinking. He kept asking whether he could drive with me to Mississippi since I was on my way to New Orleans. "Why do you want to go there?" I asked. I was surprised since he lived in North Carolina and couldn't even afford a bus ticket back home. He wouldn't answer in front of other Klansmen. (You don't brag about deeds of love in the Klan.) But after we'd drunk plenty of beer, he loosened up and quietly told me his story.

Here's the short version. A former truck driver, he'd been in the Klan his whole life. Recently, he'd had several dangerous heart operations, after which the doctors prohibited him from ever working again. He got on disability, which pays nothing in the US. So now he was dirt poor in Lexington, NC, and sleeping on the couch of his first ex-wife (he had four).

One day on TV he saw how thousands of blacks had drowned during Hurricane Katrina. He was so moved he borrowed money from friends for a bus ticket to Mississippi. For two months he helped blacks rebuild their homes, cut up and remove fallen trees, etc. It was such hard physical work for the fat man that the Klan leader invited him up to the national headquarters, where we met, to recuperate. But now he wanted to go back and continue the work or as he sheepishly put it in Klan rhetoric, "to retrieve my belongings, such as the Klan robe, so I can show it to my 17-year-old son, who's just out of prison." Despite the doctor's warning that Robert risked death if he did physical work, this Klansman had helped blacks rebuild their lives. Stories such as these have always inspired me. They remind me that underneath the stony façade many of us hide behind when we've suffered through adversity, you can always find, if you dig deep enough, a heart beating with goodness and love. I was so elated that I had to hug him again and again though it was difficult to reach around that beer belly. I was so inspired I made him my official driver in America.

Robert Moore at our release party for the two Klan members after their 5 years in prison for drugs.

Right page: Sometimes it is a little hard to embrace my new friends.



for the Asheville area. Later I learned he was the same Robert Moore identified by the *Intelligence Report* of the Southern Poverty Law

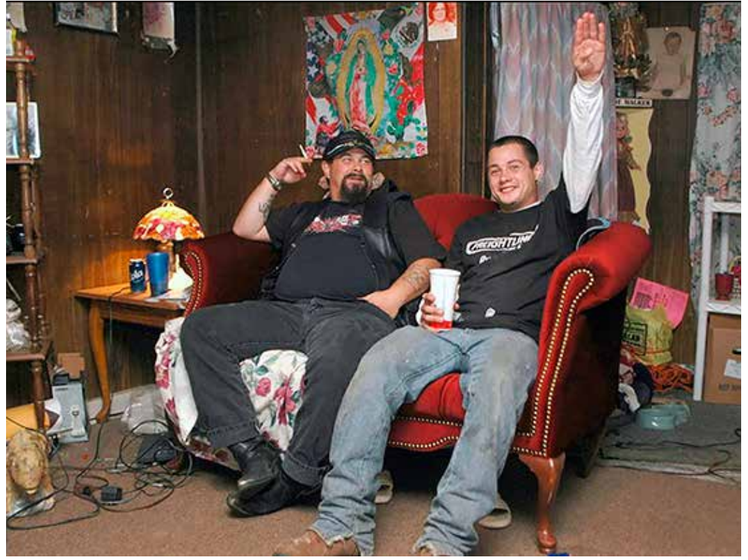
Robert Moore

Center as the Klansman who threatened to "massacre" counter-demonstrators if they dared oppose his forthcoming rally in Asheville.

The way Robert Moore appear in books about the KKK - Scary on the outside, but always look for what people contain in their hearts

What have we got the Klan for if not for engaging them in constructive antiracist work? Robert was so proud now to come with me into elitist universities, to which he, as poor white trash, had never before had access. And you hardly get a better driver than a Klansman. Most of his life, from quitting time Friday to Monday morning, he'd driven all across America on weekends, going to these ridiculous Klan rallies for 30 powerless members out in the woods where their local black friends stood laughing at them (the next day they went hunting together as they always had). He could drive 24 hours without sleep, while I

Nancy after she had slimmed down



Right page: Justin admires his father with a hearty hail salute.

could nap and read in the bed in the back of my van. Robert so moved me that I later went with him home. He is one of the few in the Klan who still says "n-word" and uses empty rhetoric like "I stand up for my race!" "Then why do you lie down on that couch while your ex-wife is screwing a Mexican in the bedroom just behind you?" I teased, knowing that Mexicans are a bit worse for the Klan since they'd jobs away from the Klan. "That wetback," he retorted, "has been a good stepfather to my sons all those years I neglected them."

To Nancy, his ex-wife, he said, "He only put up with you and your 600 pounds so he could get his green card." They both laughed. Nancy claimed she'd just lost 400 pounds, so all three of them could now sit together on the couch. Over the next few days, she confirmed in my video interview with her the story Robert had already told me.

All his childhood he'd been viciously beaten by his drunk stepfather. When he was 14, he slashed his stepfather's stomach with a razor while he slept. He served five years for attempted murder. When he got out of prison, he met and married Nancy, but they were so poor they had to share his violent stepfather's one-room shack. "Robert was completely wild," Nancy said. They were both drug addicts, and their two sons were taken into custody by Child Protective Services. Practically all their friends were black, and Nancy never heard Robert utter a bad word about blacks. Nor did she understand why he joined the Klan.

Although the KKK helped him out of drugs, she now wanted nothing to do with him and has only had black and Mexican boyfriends since they split up.

Robert's sister was equally abused and at 12 years old took a kitchen knife and cut their stepfather's throat. He survived and she was removed from their dysfunctional family. Yet it was the oldest brother I found most interesting. A hermit hiding deep in the woods, he was surprised that I found him and wouldn't let me photograph him. He'd been in and out of prison all his life for burning down homes—no matter the race of the owners. Being a pyromaniac was his way of burning crosses (or of burning his pain away).

For abused children around the world do not, of course, all end up as Klansmen, Nazis, Islamists, or gang members. There are a thousand different ways they act out their anger and unhealed wounds. If they haven't been subjected to physical abuse, it's usually mental abuse. As Hitler said, the worst wasn't all the beatings from his father but when he publicly humiliated him. And since little Adolf didn't have a loving grandmother or saving angel, he ended up taking his anger out on millions of people. That's why it's so important that we with "surpluses" learn to be saving angels for those with "deficits," such as our neighbor's abused son.

Take Robert and Nancy's two unloved sons, whom Nancy and her Mexican husband have adopted. The oldest son, Thomas, is in prison for bombing houses, while Justin, who was just released, spent a year in prison for robberies he'd committed with his black friends. "He should've stayed in prison much longer," Robert said of his mentally challenged son. Justin was 17 when I met him, and it was obvious he craved his father's love. He was seeing him for the first time—the great returned Klan leader he'd admired and missed his entire life. Robert told him stories about his "formidable battles" as an "armored crusader," and Justin fantasized about becoming a great Klansman. He outdid his father in "nigger-talk" and derogatory phrases—to such a degree it made Robert uncomfortable because he realized that his naïve son took the terms seriously.

So Justin was now running around school bragging about becoming a big Klan leader like his dad when he grew up. This didn't help with his popularity: He was the only white kid in a ghetto school. Indeed, this son of a Klan leader had never in his life had a white friend! I'd already seen that Klan phenomenon, especially in the South; Klansmen have usually gone to schools up to 95% black. As "poor white trash," they are the only whites who can't afford to take their children out of schools or move away. This explains another contradiction I'd observed. People all over the world tend to hang onto their school friends later in life, so many Klansmen end up with far more black friends than most whites. As Barack Obama wrote in his books, most whites in America don't have a single intimate black friend. Yet the Klan doesn't brag about these friendships because then society won't be able to scapegoat them as villains—the "bad guy" role they seek out in their pain and self-loathing. Growing up on the wrong side of the tracks and being stigmatized by our racist thinking gives them, especially after endless beatings by unemployed drunk stepfathers, a tremendous need to shout, "We are just as good as you whites out there in suburbia!" And they use the only language they know will make us listen—foul racist language. It was sad to sit with the three of them in Nancy's rotten shack "across the tracks," surrounded by blacks on all sides. They couldn't afford to buy kerosene for the stove on the floor, so they kept warm in their overcoats and the love that flowed in the reunited family—most often expressed via the two boys teasing Nancy about her sex life with her Mexican boyfriend, Pedro, whom Robert grudgingly admitted he loves. "Blessed are the meek," I always think when I'm with the Klan, "for they shall inherit the earth."

I followed Robert over the years and thought I now knew everything about him. I laughed when I saw him on the Jerry Springer show faking the "bad guy" role he'd learned so well. In front of hundreds of hateful spectators, he beat up Justin for having a black girlfriend, while Justin, the not-so-smart son, attacked his half-sister Tania for having a "Wetback baby" (she wept on stage, "But you love both him and your own Mexican stepfather and only act like this to get your father's love"). All of them had been paid, driven in limousines,

2015 - Ten years later, I wed Robert to his fifth wife, with invited Klan sympathizers. See the video with Robert and me below.

accommodated in the finest hotels, manipulated, and choreographed by Jerry Springer to make the whole world believe that they hate Mexicans and blacks in a gladiatorial show for us, the real haters.
Well, ten years later Robert asked me to marry him to his fifth wife, Peggy, "a good Christian," a minister's daughter from up north trying to be his saving angel. So, I drove with a Danish TV-crew all the way to Arkansas. I had wedded Muslim and Jewish couples, so I felt that it could be fun also to marry a Christian-Klan couple. Here's an extract of my wedding speech, filmed in front of Robert's surprised Klan friends:

"Dear Robert and Peggy,
Today, we are together with your friends because your marriage through civil matrimony shall now be confirmed. [...] For you two, Robert and Peggy, it has been a long rocky road before you found each other and in some way saved each other.
When I met you in the Klan, contrary to what I expected, I did not find any hate in your group, but very much love in the people whom I soon realized had not had much love in their own childhood. [...] I hope you do not mind me telling it here, how you were brutally beaten and mistreated since you were four years old by your violent stepfather ... and when you were 14, you cut up your stepfather's stomach with a razor blade and got five years in prison. And then trouble started again. One day you were lynching a black...."
Here I choked on my words, literally in deep pain. For during my jogging, the same morning, I fell and broke a rib and was hospitalized. When I went by with the film crew to tell Robert that I wasn't sure whether I'd be able to make the wedding that evening and he saw my pain and bandaged wounds, he said that there was something he wanted to confess to me which he'd never told me before. "Well, Jacob, I have to lighten my heart and tell you first that I once lynched a black man. It started in North Carolina when he molested a little girl, four years old. The father of the little girl was a good friend of one of our members. So we picked him up one night when we were at a party drinking a lot of beer ... just like we're doing here today. We took him up to the mountains and put a rope around his neck and asked him if he had anything to say. He said, 'May God be merciful upon my soul.' That is when I hung him. He dropped. And then I cut his throat to make sure he was dead." Robert, like me, was now visibly troubled. "I have nightmares." I was in complete shock. "You do?"
"Yes, sometimes when I close my eyes, I see that nigger there swinging. Yes, somebody who says they can kill somebody, and it don't bother them, well, they are full of shit. After all these years I still wake up like somebody poured water all over me. It's something I have to talk with Peggy about because it bothers me. The nightmares just keep coming back and keep coming back. It is a never-ending thing for me."
I was speechless and although I should have stayed with Robert, I decided to go back with the camera crew to their hotel to reflect on whether I could now conduct the marriage the same evening. I decided that I could not let him down even though we were now in double pain. I had to be lifted out of bed screaming with my broken rib.
So here are pieces from the rest of my long wedding speech:
".... one day, Robert, you saw on TV how Hurricane Katrina devastated Mississippi and Louisiana, drowning thousands of people. You were so moved by seeing all the suffering and ... there you worked to help people build their houses again ... Hard physical work ... here I saw how you put your own life at risk to save black people... This is what I call 'love disguised as hate' and it's therefore people like you, Robert, who give my life inspiration ...
And so I want to end with a quote from St. Paul: 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud ... Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.' I ask you, Robert, will you have Peggy as your spouse?"
My speech released tremendous joy, surprise, and relief from the partying Klan members, who said they had learned so much about themselves. Since then I've continued my talk with Robert about the lynching.
"Would you have done it also to a white pedophile?"
"Yes, Jacob, you know that I don't see in colors."
Hm, indeed a convincing answer from a committed Klansman. With my knowledge about the Klan's tremendous hatred of pedophiles, which apparently also is politically correct in America, I understood his logic. Robert committed his crime in 1985, four years after the lynching of Michael Donald, officially the last recorded lynching. It brought one of the Klansmen to the electric chair while my old friend Morris Dees got a court to award $7 million to his mother, which literally bankrupted the United Klans of America. Robert was sentenced to only 10 years in prison, for it wasn't considered a hate killing, just the murder of a pedophile. When Robert got out of prison in 1995, his punishment wasn't over. His nightmares about the killing continued in a way psychologists today conclude is a classic example of PTSD. This makes me conclude two things.

When I met him in 2005, he felt too ashamed of his crime to tell me about it despite being otherwise honest. It was no longer politically correct in the Klan to lynch blacks or even hurt them, only to demand "equal justice for all" by resisting affirmative action programs for blacks. As the Klan always laughingly said to me, "Everybody thinks we still go around hanging blacks from trees."

Robert confessed to me that he had lynched a black man.

Still plagued by guilt and PTSD nightmares when Katrina hit in 2005, 10 years after his prison term, Robert must have felt that only by risking his own life to save black lives—giving back the life he took—could he redeem himself. Around the same time, I'd often heard him talk about how he'd reconciled with his violent stepfather, whom he'd hated his whole life. He'd driven a long way to be him on his deathbed, and it had given him much relief and validation to hear his dad finally say, "I am sorry." In my talks with him and Nancy, I realized that he himself saw a direct line going from his violent childhood to the youthful rage that first turned him into a drug addict whose only friends were black, then to his rejection of both them and Nancy, terminating with the lynching of a black man.

When you go through terror in childhood, you're never free and, emotions killed, you disconnect from reality.
No wonder I today see Robert post a lot about Jesus on Facebook.
In some way I see him carrying the cross of his redeeming savior as well as those of the two crucified sinners at his sides.

Wedding of Robert with his confession of lynching a black man

Trying to understand the roots of white hate: Love disguised as hate - II.

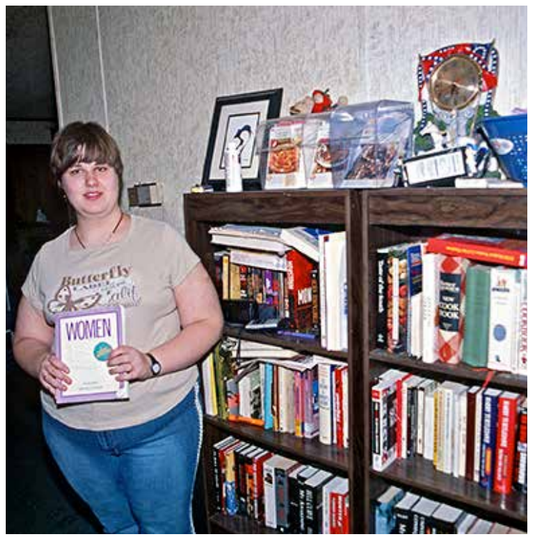
"The Klan is alive and well, and it's not just hiding in the shadows. It's in the police departments, it's in the courtrooms, it's in the government." - Opal Tometi, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

During my long work with the Klan, I never saw them commit violence against blacks, but I saw plenty of violence among their own. Raine, who belonged to another Klan group, had read what I wrote about the Ku Klux Klan on my website and invited me to her home in North Carolina since, she said, "I have a university degree in sociology and have studied the members of our group and came to the same conclusion as you about their abused childhood." When she served me morning coffee in bed, she told me about her two prison sentences.

"What for?" I asked. "Didn't you know I'm a double murderer?" Hearing this from the sweet 20-year-old woman at my side, I almost spit out the coffee. She then told me how, as a 14-year-old, she ran away from her abusive racist father, became an anti-racist skinhead, and lived in Los Angeles in a garage with some Mexican girls. One day, in self-defense, she killed an intruding Mexican drug gangster. After two years in prison and feeling betrayed by the Latinos, she returned home, and now 17, she had turned a Neo-Nazi and shot a white antiracist demonstrator, "also in self-defense." Then "Good Christian Klan people" intervened, "teaching me that what mattered in life was to do good to others rather than kill them." They sent her on missionary work in Africa for half a year.

Raine loved Africa and was impressed to see for the first time how black children were disciplined and eager to learn. "It was the complete opposite of the rowdy ghetto kids I went to school with in the US."
Back home, her rise in the Klan was meteoric, and she set out to become America's first female Klan leader. She was Klan leader Virgil Griffin's speechwriter and brain. She's also the only educated Klan member I've met. She was a declared feminist and pro-homosexual activist, saying "there's too much homophobia and sexism in the Klan."
Raine invited me to a Klan fall rally in the woods to meet her friends, but later that year, when I asked whether I could post my photos from the rally on my website, she begged me to wait. The Klan usually loves

Embedding with the Klan at Raine's in 2005



The feminist klan member with her books on feminism and gay liberation

Raine and Billy show off their black-and-white ferret harmony, but they were embarrassed to take me to a Chinese restaurant, their favorite food.

when I put members on display and give them a shot at fame, which is what their membership is all about, but right then she was applying for "the dream job of my life as a counselor for [black] criminals in our local prison. But you can't work for the state in NC if you're a member of the KKK."

So, what was behind her desire to "do good to" blacks? As it turns out, a childhood injury (something she has in common with many other Klan members). Raine had grown up in the ghetto as a poor white, and her school friends were almost exclusively black.

Yet she was never allowed to take her playmates home because of father's racism, which he justified by saying "They're all criminals and drug addicts." He wasn't entirely wrong. Ghettoized children do not, as we know, behave like saints. So ever since childhood, Raine had dreamed of helping her former friends become "better people." In Africa she'd started to understand how ghettoization in America caused blacks to behave in the way that so repelled her father. It wasn't because they were "black." She started deconstructing American racism, which associates blacks with crime. So after a short college education, she now got the chance to help them in prison, where so many of her black friends had ended up.
Did she see any contradiction in this? No, "for when the blacks become 'good people' like us," it'll no longer necessary to have the Ku Klux Klan to "protect the white race from their crime and drugs," she reasoned quite logically and, yes, lovingly. Shortly afterward, she excitedly called me up in Denmark: "Jacob, I got my dream job, so you can post your pictures on the Internet."
Well, half a year later, I saw articles all over the Internet about Raine's "brutal rape and murder." Shocked, I called her husband, Billy. He said that after many blood transfusions she'd miraculously survived the assassination attempt by two Klan members, David Laceter and Scott Belk. The Klan group had nothing against her counseling blacks in prison, but she'd warned me about Belk, whom I met one of the few times he was out of prison. He was extremely dangerous because he was a member of the Aryan Brotherhood prison gang, which didn't approve of Raine's being on the side of the black gangs, with whom they always had bloody fights. Shortly after I photographed Scott, he and David broke into Raine's house, raped her, and shot her with a submachine gun. She later showed

Scot Belk when I met him in the Klan rally

me the bullet scars. David was jailed as the one who'd "pierced Raine with bullets" and was murdered in prison.

During the long hospital stay and trial, Raine could no longer hide her KKK membership from the prison and was fired in accordance with state laws. But the story's not over.

The black prisoners revolted and forced the prison to rehire their most popular social worker. Were they not aware that she was a member of the KKK, the prison asked? Yes, the blacks had known all along. Prisons have a program called "gang-awareness training" to help them stay out of gangs when they're released, which isn't easy with all the social control they're subjected to.

And in Southern prisons, the KKK is considered just a poor white-trash gang, which is exactly what it is. One day the prisoners had to watch a video of the local Klan group, and they immediately recognized Raine's voluminous figure. This only made her more popular among the blacks: "Wow, she's a gang member just like us!" Although Raine's friends in the Klan had nothing against her work for the blacks, she knew she was in danger when Belk started spreading a rumor she was "snitching for the state." She continued her idealistic work of "improving [the situations of] blacks" despite her knowledge that she was now putting her life on the line. This is again what I call love disguised as hate, a Klan member willing to risk her life to help blacks.

I can't meet a cold-blooded murderer, such as Scottland "Scott" Kevin Belk, without trying to understand his inner human being, and I learned a lot more about him through his later crimes. He was severely abused by a single mother, who, to keep him quiet, turned him into a drug addict at the age of 8. As an adult, he kept up his drug habit and in 1998, along with a girlfriend, whom he'd hooked on drugs, he robbed a bank of $3,000. While having sex with his black dealer, he told her about the heist. Apparently, she betrayed him to the police to escape prison herself, and Scott spent a few years behind bars. Here he entered the Aryan Brotherhood as revenge against his black snitch. When I met him at a KKK rally in 2003, right after prison, he was trying to get his life together, partly by joining a peaceful picnicking-partying KKK group and partly by getting a permanent job as a truck driver. Scott was married to Rhonda Belk at the time. To their great misfortune, his crack-smoking mother, Margarette Kalinosky, moved in with them and got them both addicted to crack, and their

The movie about Scot Belk

lives deteriorated again. Exactly two years after I met him, during an argument over money for drugs, he became desperate, hit his mother with a baseball bat, and strangled her. He then fled with his wife in one of his employer's trucks, driving to New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Pretending to be a priest, he painted relief slogans on the truck and drove to Gainesville, TX, where he and Rhonda posed as Katrina refugees. A church helped them get to Seattle, where they rented an apartment from a woman who eventually recognized them from an FBI most-wanted poster. In 2007, Belk was sentenced to 15 years in prison, while Rhonda received five years for the murder of his mother, who had abused him and turned him into a drug addict. Scott's life inspired a Hollywood TV series: I (Almost) Got Away with It: Got to Pose as Katrina Refugees, whereby he finally got the "moment of fame" all Klansmen dream of. Not only was his story being brought to the screen by famous actors, but he was allowed to be in the series himself, talking from prison about the drama of his life. Raine's other would-be murderer, David Laceter, had a similar history as a drug addict and narco-gangster and, like Scott, had belonged to the Aryan Brotherhood as well as the World Church of the Creator, a Nazi group, until his murder in 2003. White hate always has deep roots.

Taking into consideration how such hardcore killers and haters never got any help

After the assassination attempt, Raine was heavily armed, fearful of further attacks but proud to get her job back, working to help blacks in prison.

during their abused childhoods always reaffirmed my belief that it's never too late to reach them—if only to protect ourselves and society from their rage. I got my chance when Raine arranged for me to meet the imperial wizard of her Klan group, Virgil Griffin, one of the most notorious and hateful Klan leaders. This was a severe test for me since I was deeply prejudiced against him. He was the Klan leader behind the 1979 Greensboro massacre, in which five anti-Klan demonstrators were killed. One of my old friends, Willena Cannon, helped organize the demonstration. One day, while sitting with her and her 4-year-old son, Kwame, in her kitchen on S. Eugene Street, she told me why she'd worked with Jesse Jackson in the Civil Rights Movement to integrate Greensboro's businesses. At the age of 9, she'd witnessed a black man being burned alive in a barn. His crime had been to fall in love with a white woman. His screams filled the night, and she never forgot it.

Thirty years later, both she and her son, Kwame, now 10, were almost killed by the Klan. Unfortunately, Sandy Smith, the ex-girlfriend of my co-worker Tony Harris, was among the dead. I'd hung out with them in Bennett College, a black women's school, when Sandy was president of the student government. I was dating her friend Alfrida, who was just as proud of her beautiful afro as Sandy was of hers. Although Tony urged me to "make a move," these well-educated black women had strong social control against "being with a honky." So I always ended up only helping Alfrida write her term papers all night while Tony was sleeping with Sandy. We were young and free and thought society was moving toward more racial freedom. So no one was more shocked than Tony when just six years later, as he watched on Norwegian TV (while on tour with American Pictures), the Klan unpacked their guns and murdered his ex-girlfriend in his hometown. Tony and the other blacks in our Copenhagen work collective had resisted when I put pictures of the Klan into the slideshow, saying, "We fight racism today. The Klan is a thing of the past and will make your show look old fashioned." Now they insisted that I put them into American Pictures. I was also shaken because the Greensboro massacre took place right outside the door of the Morningside Homes project, where I'd lived with Baggie, who can be seen with Nixon in my "beauty and the beast" photo on page 312. We were more outraged when the Klansmen were acquitted by an all-white jury—although the whole world had witnessed the murder. In other words, the KKK was still "politically correct" in 1979. In fact, the police had tipped them off about the demonstration, watched them pack weapons into their cars and stayed away while they used them on Tony's and my friends—most of whom were children. But when one of the children in the protest, Kwame Cannon, turned 17 he was arrested for nonviolent burglaries and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences. This was partly because Tony's uncle, Pinckney Moses, whom I'd often hung out with in law school, was too drunk to provide Kwame with adequate legal counsel. But also because his mother, Willena, was warned by the judge that, because of her roots in community activism, there would be dire consequences if Kwame didn't accept a plea bargain.

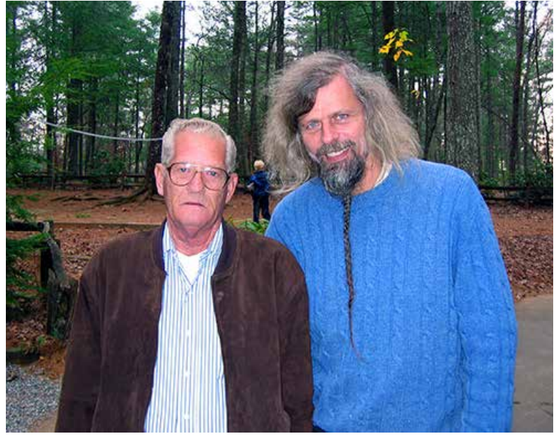
Well, times change, and in 2020 the city of Greensboro formally apologized for the

Virgil L. Griffin (C), seen here at a 1982 rally in front of the Raleigh, North Carolina state house, was among nine persons indicted by a Federal Grand Jury 4/21/1983 on charges of conspiring to disrupt an anti-Klan rally which resulted in the deaths of five members of the Communists Workers Party. Griffin was the Grand Dragon or head of the North Carolina chapter of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Virgil Griffin in 1982 at a Klan rally

Virgil Griffin when I met him in 2005

My date Alfrida - friend of Sandy - whom Virgil Griffin's Klan group murdered



My walk with Virgil Griffin where he opened his heart to me

Klan massacre and raised a memorial to the victims. When I had a chance to meet Virgil Griffin, the massacre's mastermind, I decided not to let him in any way feel that I harbored deep negative thoughts about him. Tony Harris, however, wanted me to press him on why he'd ordered the killings. "I promise," I said, "but I won't let the past get in the way of trying to reach him and help him out of his pent-up anger." The whole drive up from Atlanta, with Tony's biracial son at my side, I thought the most positive loving thoughts I could muster: "Love him, smile at him, love him, so that he can really feel it."

I knew I only had one day to practice nonviolent communication with Virgil, so it would be a superficial experiment to see how much people are influenced by what we think about them. Admittedly, it wasn't easy. When I met Virgil and his Klan group in a remote forest area one morning, I was more influenced, overwhelmed even, by what their hostile looks suggested they thought of me (Raine had told them she was bringing an antiracist). I started with Tony's difficult question. The great imperial wizard gave the same answer that had gotten him acquitted in court: "We shot communists in Vietnam. So why shouldn't we fight them here at home?" Oh, right, the demonstration had been organized by the local Textile Workers' Union, known to be fairly "Communist" in name, so how could I possibly disagree with the all-white jury that his actions were "politically correct"? Especially in this reactionary southern state such a short time after the Vietnam War? Since Griffin saw no difference between "communists" and "antiracists," I knew that I'd get nowhere with accusations about his past. Instead, for the rest of the day, I forced myself to send him my most loving thoughts and smiles—using unifying "giraffe" language against their violent and divisive "jackal" language. Of course, I had selfish reasons too—it makes a lot of sense when you're alone among 50 raving-mad heavily armed Klansmen in a secluded forest. Oh no! Slip of tongue! Don't label these "children of pain" mad. They're victims whose entire lives have been tied up by our distancing or outright hateful thoughts about them. They've never felt our love, only our counterproductive "Death to the Klan" threats, like those the demonstrators shouted in Greensboro—with lethal results for the protesters. I knew they were no different from ghetto residents in their craving for our love and that it's never too late to show them a little of our own so-called "humanity." Still, a Klan leader, just like the leader of a black gang, has to play tough in front the members, so for a long time Virgil avoided me or unleashed his Klan rhetoric on me if Klansmen were standing nearby. I spent that time slowly making "allies" among the members.

As the day went on, Griffin was clearly more and more influenced by my "loving" thoughts (there's far more to actual love). At first he nervously smiled back, but by afternoon he seemed almost flirtatious. This also loosened me up since I have my own desire to be loved. Late in the day, he suddenly asked whether I'd go for a walk with him in the woods "to talk under four eyes." I agreed.

His first imperative was to convince me he hadn't burned down any black churches. He had two of his gas stations impounded because my Klan hunting friend Morris Dees had sued him after the police found an old membership card from Griffin's Klan group on one of the arsonists. "You must believe me, Jacob. I'm a deeply religious person and could never dream of burning down a church." It was so important to him that I believed him that by doing so I gained his friendship. And it wasn't hard to believe him. I knew from Jeff Berry that Klan leaders make a good living by selling membership cards to young insecure men, who go around bragging about their cards, but the leaders never see these men in the Klan. The cards are a huge risk because if police find one on a person involved in a hate crime, the Klan leader is held responsible whether he was involved in the crime or not. To avoid imprisonment, Klan leaders are therefore extremely cautious about letting violent people into their group. As Jeff once told me, "I can't use 80% of the people who apply for membership. They're nuts." I knew what he was talking about since I pick up so many of these lost "nuts" on the highways. So, believe it or not, this is how the Klan has again become "politically correct," pretty much hiding in small cozy beer rallies out in the woods. Trump took it further, sending the message that it was "politically correct" to come out of the woods and join his white movement in Charlottesville and elsewhere—even with their guns and violence.

Griffin probably mistook my insider (but unspoken) knowledge about the Klan for loving forgiveness—something he'd never gotten from anyone before but clearly sought, for now he really opened up and told me the long story of how he'd been in the Klan since he began picking cotton as a 19-year-old during the Civil Rights Movement, "which was going too far too fast." He'd had a long sad life, but it was coming to an end: He'd recently had three bypass surgeries. "I know I'm going to die soon," he said. "But in February I turn 60, and it would mean so much to me if you could come to my birthday. Please, won't you promise?" I was so surprised and moved that I promised to try. When the day ended, I said goodbye to all my new friends:

"So I'll see you again soon at Virgil's birthday."

"What?" they asked in astonishment. I suddenly realized that not one of them had been invited to the birthday party! With all the self-loathing typical of Klan members, they're often so disgusted by what they see in each other, of their own pain and misfortune, that Griffin wasn't interested in inviting his own kind. No, what these deficit people are hungry for is the love from us, those with a surplus. Those outside their ghetto. For the human warmth they can't readily find or express inside the Klan, whose emotionally stunted members I always see looking lonely during rallies. Over the years that I worked with Klan groups, I was often their longest-standing "member." After less than a year, I usually saw them quit and join Alcoholics Anonymous, NA, or church groups—anywhere they could find a little of that love that the Klan philosophy didn't allow to blossom in them.

That's why my little experiment in nonviolent communication, although I had only one day to try it out, had succeeded even with Griffin, one of the allegedly most dangerous Klan leaders since the '60s. Only a few months later, Griffin left "The Cleveland Knights of the KKK," which he'd ruled most of his life, and the group fell apart. I'm not saying it was solely a result of my involvement; there are always many factors that help change people's lives. But for a man who'd been on the defensive his whole life, including being confronted by a crowd chanting "Death to the Klan!", for him to suddenly meet something he confused with real love can make a difference. This is especially true when it happens at a vulnerable moment, such as when he, as "a good Christian, have to meet my maker."

I always tell my students, "Try this loving method on your worst teacher … and see how fast your grades go up." Clearly it worked on two of America's most notorious Klan leaders. Moreover, my long travels among violent people have convinced me that positive thinking about people works on everybody and that it's in our own self-interest, as well as society's, that we genuinely try "to love our fellow man."

Understanding the roots of white hate: Regarding the pain of serial murderers

"No 'we' should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain—... Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers—... To designate a hell is not to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell's flames—... Photographs of the suffering and martyrdom of a people, or of children, transform these events into something beautiful. The ghoulish cruelties and the unbelievable ruthlessness of the deeds shown are depicted as well—... Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us." – Susan Sontag in "Regarding the pain of others"

While driving one night in 1991, I saw an older white woman in the darkness under the freeway pillars and picked her up. She'd been attacked by black hoodlums and was bleeding so profusely I had to take her to a hospital. An hour later I spotted a white man on the side of the road. Angry and tense, he'd been fired without pay from a shrimp boat in the Gulf and had been waiting three days for a ride. Considering the desperation in Woody's eyes, I easily could've triggered the violence in him by sending out vibrations of fear and distrust. When I told him about the white woman who'd just been left for dead by her black attackers, Woody began to open up. (I had no idea at the time how deeply involved in his family I'd become.) He said he'd never been attacked by blacks because he "always attacked them first." Little by little he told me how he and his two brothers had killed so many "niggers that I can't count them on my fingers and toes." Now I was wide awake. At first I'd thought he was just bragging, but there were too many descriptive details and locations in his stories. So when he also talked about his own mistreatment as a child, I made a deal with him: I'd bring him home, four hours out of my way, if he'd tell his stories and let me tape record them. "But I won't tell you where I live. Just let me off somewhere in my town." He knew I could go straight to the police with my tape.

In my show, updated to include Woody and his family, his voice shocked university students. Some years after I'd met him, having listened to his nightmarish voice night after night, I was curious to find out how he was doing. When I finally had the chance on a tour in spring of 1996, I invited a Norwegian publisher of Toni Morrison's books, Eli Saeter, to be my witness. What especially scared her was that everyone we met had been in prison for murder and rape. "They remind me of those men in the movie Deliverance," she said. When we arrived, a dense fog hung over the place. It gave our hunt for a serial murderer in this swampy area, where we couldn't see even six feet ahead of us, an eerie unreal aura. After three days we found his cousin. "It's true, as you say, Woody came here five years ago," he said. "He and his friend Bobby broke into a house, and Woody stabbed a 16-year-old girl while she was sleeping. He got 25 years in prison. He was an idiot during the trial. Made noise, laughed at the judge, and made fun of everyone. I tried to calm him down, but to no avail. He destroyed everything for himself."

We found Woody's victim, Sarah, who told us about that horrible night. She'd been forced out of bed by Woody, who ripped open her stomach and lungs with a long knife. She survived thanks to several expensive hospital stays, but no one had given this poor family help in dealing with the trauma.

It had happened only a couple of days after I'd dropped Woody off. This was depressing—I'd really believed during our night together I'd helped him get in touch with the deep pain and anger he felt. I tried to tell Sarah that Woody was my friend, but my voice broke against guilt and regret when I saw the terror in her eyes. She was unable to see him as anything but a bloodthirsty monster and talked about how he'd behaved like an "animal" during the trial, shouting "I'm gonna get you one day!" before he was dragged out of the courtroom in chains. She'd had nightmares about his returning ever since. It was important to see and understand Sarah, the victim of the would-be executioner, since for so many years I'd dealt mostly with the victim inside the executioner.

When we went to Woody's home, a woman opened the screen door and said, "I know who you are. Woody came home five years ago feeling uplifted. He said he'd been picked up by a strange man who'd gotten him to tell him everything about himself. I wondered who that could be since Woody is the most secretive person I know."
Adeline was the mother of Bobby, Woody's accomplice, and lived with Rose, the mother of Woody's two older brothers, Sammy and John.

"Oh yes, it's horrible. It's not like Woody to do such a thing, but he was desperate when you brought him home fired with no pay after working for months in the Gulf. He and Bobby had both been drinking and had taken a lot of drugs, and I believe it was Bobby who did it. They came running home, knocking on the door at 2 a.m., shouting, 'Mom! Mom! We did something terrible!' Then they fainted and collapsed right there on the lawn, where they were asleep when the police picked them up."
I was relieved hearing there'd been nothing deliberate about his bloodlust in Sarah's house, just the deep pain and rage I'd sensed in him. High on dope, they'd stolen a bike in front of Sarah's house then started fighting over it. Woody suddenly broke into the house to grab a kitchen knife to use against his half-brother, who fled. In a frenzy of bloodlust, Woody then kicked in all the doors and tried to stab the sleeping family. As for Woody's "animal" behavior during the trial, Adeline now recounted that "he'd been frightened out of his wits and his legs shook under him at the feeling that his life was suddenly over." The poor are incessantly harming themselves, I thought, since Woody's behavior had convinced everyone in the courtroom that he should never come out again, and he'd been given an additional 10 years in prison. What immediately forged strong bonds between Adeline and me was the love we both felt for Woody. I was amazed at her understanding of how the injuries he'd suffered in childhood had led to his violence.
Woody's brothers, then? He said they took him out on their killing sprees when they killed blacks for no reason. Trusting the intimacy I'd established with Adeline, I asked whether it could be true.
"Oh, yeah," said Adeline, who'd often overheard them mention such killings, but added that the father, Vincent, had been even worse. Not to mention the grandfather!
"We just did things like that down here in the past!" It was as if she was apologizing for them.
"Sammy is like his father. A horrible man. It was an organization that stopped him in the end. Life in prison. He's not coming out, ever." Slightly annoyed, she said the reason Woody's eldest brother had been jailed for his latest murder was that the NAACP had called the killing "a hate crime" (in the past nothing happened to them after their murders). She added that Sammy continued to murder blacks in prison. A black prisoner told him that he'd soon be released. "No, you ain't!" Sammy replied, and the night before his release, Sammy poured gasoline over him and set him on fire, reducing him to a charred corpse. Woody had previously told me that Sammy was the leader of the prison's "Aryan gang."

Woody the night I picked him up in 1991 after my lecture in U. of Houston

In the absence of a real mother, Woody called Adeline "Mom" and at least once a week called her from prison. It was all further complicated by the fact that Woody had been dating Adeline's junkie daughter, Dawn, for whom she, like her son Bobby, apparently didn't have any great feelings.
And what about the middle brother, John? Did he also participate in the killings?
"I don't know how many, but I know for sure that John killed a man at least once. He only got three years in prison for it."
We later drove out to visit John in the swamps despite Adeline's having warned us sternly against it. "Don't you realize he's the worst of them all! He's tough, cold, and he will in no way talk to you." She drew such a frightening portrait that Eli, who'd heard more than enough about violence by now, insisted we move on, especially since, if we wanted to get there before dark, we were running out of time. But now that I'd

Angel waving goodbye to us from the trailer

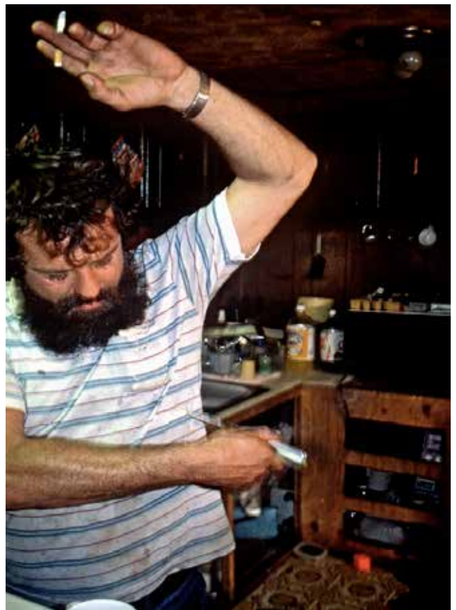
finally found the man who could corroborate what Woody had said to me in his interview, I wasn't going to give up. As we drove through the endless swamp, where bare trees stood like skeletal fingers overhung with cobwebs of ghostly Spanish moss, Eli looked more and more pale. "Didn't you come along to experience America?" I was trying to cheer her up, amused that reality had borrowed the worst Hollywood visual effects (on top of the heavy fog still lying over the black crocodile-infested waters). "Why do people sit through such movies when reality is far more exciting," I asked Eli.

Deep in the swamp too close to dark, I managed to find a rotten trailer with plastic over the windows. The usual rubbish of old car wrecks and rusty boats lay scattered around. And when I saw two dirty little white girls, shaggy and barefoot, their noses snotty, I knew instantly these were John's children. Eli was so scared she locked all the car doors and refused to get out. The scene she saw in front of her was right out of Deliverance (in Norway the film was called "Excursion with Death"). She feared that if John came out and shot us no one would ever find our corpses in those swamps. I recalled Woody's detailed description of how their faces had stiffened when they caught one of their own dissolving corpses in the crawfish net.

Yet I displayed neither courage nor naïvete in seeking out John, for in the middle of this dark wetland I felt I was on completely solid ground. I was in an almost euphoric state of being, basking in the light of the transformation one perceives when one of the great questions of life is at last being clarified.
It's important to note the ecstatic state of mind I arrived in because when John ended up, as I'd predicted, behaving in a way diametrically opposed to what one would expect of a terrifying psychopath, as his family had insisted he was, it was precisely because I'd mentally built up this desperate man to be the one holding the answer to the riddle of life. Thus, I could give him the unimaginable powers people gain when you show them trust and deep human interest: he felt accepted and loved.
Certainly, he was isolated, hostile, and, yes, awe-inspiring. His came to the door armed with a gun, his beard wild and symbols of violence tattooed on body. Yet rarely have I met a man who was so quick to open up when I told him I was a friend of Woody's. Immediately the gun was put away and replaced by cups of fresh-brewed coffee. I soon felt such an exuberant warmth from John and his wife, Connie, that I went out and persuaded Eli to join us. He was indeed the same blood-dripping "monster" that Woody had talked about in his interview and hammered into my consciousness during five years' of my lecture soundtrack. But at the same time—and Eli agreed—he was a small cowed child whom one could hardly help but embrace. When you bear in mind that I could easily have been a shrewd police informer, it's amazing how little it takes to open such people up and how eager they are to talk about themselves. And in that very conversation, with its gradual processing of pain, lies the answer to all violence. Yet governments the world over go blind with their antiquated eye-for-an-eye rhetoric and recidivist repressive reflexes right out of Lucifer's right-wing fortress.

The rest of the day, John and Connie recounted the violence that ran through their whole family. "Just look at Angel here." Connie lifted up the abused the two-and-half-year-old. "She's full of violence against her sister. She's the bad one!" And both Eli and I thought that that's how she would end up if told from childhood that she was "bad" and "not good enough." The mother gave her several proper spankings, but we almost never saw her cry. Instead, her red-eyed face carried a permanent mortified look of resentment.
Both parents talked openly about how it was only when they were drunk that they exploded in violence,
and we quickly formed a picture of how horrible the conditions must be for the two children. They gave endless examples of all the violence they'd been involved in. I didn't even need to ask about the murders of blacks; their bloody side comments about them were a perfect fit with Woody's descriptions. When I asked to see the weapons used in the various murders, John brought out seven rifles and three pistols, which he'd already taught the little girls to use. He even demonstrated with his knife how he'd stabbed a black father in front of his family. I tried to frame my photos of him under a picture of his own father, the one who'd passed all that violence on to them. It hung on the wall in a gold frame, radiating an eerie evilness that couldn't be covered up by the photographer's neat studio setup or Sunday dress.

John wanted us to stay the night and go



John demonstrating how he twisted the knife in the black man

John showing me some of his gun collection on children's bed

Family photo of Johns parents, Rose and Vincent

The crocodile infested swamps John and Connie lived in

alligator hunting with him the next day. (He made a living illegally poaching alligators and had filled the fridge with alligator meat.) I was up for it, but Eli objected to "going on an alligator hunt in the swamps with a serial murderer in dense fog." So after a warm farewell, we set off in the dark. We were petrified on the drive back and could hardly talk about anything else.

1996 Fall trip

In the fall I invited the Danish TV-reporter Helle Vibeke Risgaard to record the traumatized family for TV. John was working "offshore," so Connie could talk more openly about him. For several days we heard about one murder after another—this time for an open Betacam video. When it all came in a rambling stream and incoherent asides, it didn't take long before we were falling-down dizzy. After a few hours, we could neither remember nor even care about all the murders we'd heard about. Connie was a strange concoction. She appeared to be a rational woman of exalted composure, and yet we knew from Rose and Adeline that she was even more violent than John, whom they actually saw as her victim. Several times she said that if it hadn't been for her religion and the children, she'd long ago have left him. Yet we soon began to doubt that; for without her children, whom would she be able to beat? With John away, we had the courage to drink with Connie, usually until 4 in the morning, and we had ample opportunity to see her relationship with the two abused children. She was loving one moment but the next would fly into an uncontrollable rage, whipping 3-year-old Angel with a leather belt. This developed into a momentary conflict between Helle and me. Helle impulsively tried to reach out and protect the child, which drove me crazy since that prevented me from photographing the abuse. "What an evil man you are!" she shouted, along with similar accusations (understandably I might add). "If you had traveled a little more in black ghettos," I snapped, "and seen that kind of abuse every single day, you'd know it's not your job to save every single child in a moment of sentimentality. No, your job, through your empowering presence, is to give these parents the love for themselves that's necessary for them to express love for their children. Yet to avoid the very sight of violence and abused children, we do the opposite and all flee the ghetto. And that's how we ultimately become the direct cause of its abused children." I also knew that I didn't have to lecture Connie about how it's wrong to discipline her "evil children" with violence, for all people know deep down that it's wrong to beat children. If I'd started in with moralizing sermons, however, she'd just have felt even worse about herself. Also, my "higher common sense" told me that it wasn't necessary to intervene because the child so obviously expected the beatings. She didn't even cry. Instead, out of spite she continued the behavior that had made her mother crazy. While I knew that this was an extraordinary chance for me to get some pictures for one of the most central and educational sections of my show about poor whites, photographing this abuse was certainly not something I enjoyed. Often I asked myself what the limit was—when would I actually step in?

Contrary to the unrestrained violence common among poor blacks, the presence of a stranger generally quelled the aggression of poor white parents. My photography was itself what told Connie that her behavior was unacceptable but in a way that was gentler than if we'd reprimanded her or accused her of being "a bad person." Indeed, that would've been a replay of what she was doing with the child. I've probably offended a lot of readers at this point (although the

Connie beating up two-year-old Angel

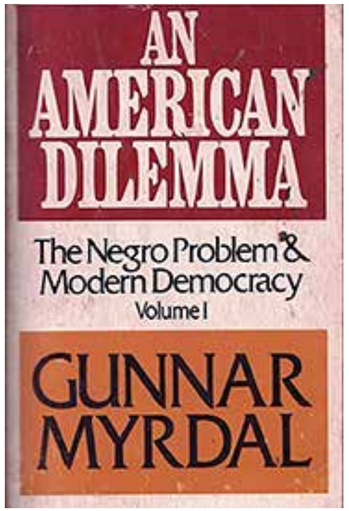
The mistreated Angel. Was she looking for help?

Connie whipping the children

same offended readers never complain about the violence in my show). When my show had a renaissance in the 90'es, I think it portrayed the growing violence in us as reflected in increasing child abuse. This led to a growing interest in the pedagogy of oppression. Raising the collective awareness of the roots of oppression will be the true salvation of the child. Nevertheless, I would also readily defend the opposite view, which claims that it's critical to stop the around-the-clock violence against children (and women), however briefly, even if it means destroying key photographic proof of it. For if the few of us who seek out these outcasts—solely to document and thus exploit them—don't step in, then who should? No matter what the reason for being in such a situation, the Good Samaritan doesn't close his eyes, open his lens ... and pass by!

The worst part of this whole situation was not the conflict between these different ethical positions, straight out of Dostoevsky, but what both Helle and I soon felt toward the abused child. When we first stepped into this waterlogged hornet's nest, our immediate sympathy had been for the two battered children with black circles under their eyes. We'd soon feel how "we" always end up helping to force such victims into the oppressor's role—the vicious circle. Never have I seen it so clearly as in the three-year-old Angel; every single reaction of hers was out of spite. We all know how the abused often bite the outstretched hand and how they destroy everything around them to get attention. At first you feel like picking up the child and caressing her, but the child rapidly obliterates all the surplus affection and love we can muster. And when, from 8 in the evening till 4 in the morning, that "evil" little "Angel" ended up destroying almost all our cameras, microphones, cords, and tapes, then, yes, we gradually felt violence in ourselves build up—all the way to the point where we too

7-year-old Natasha on the day she proudly confessed to having crushed the head of a black boy



The "Bible of racism research" inspiring Johnson to enact his civil rights laws

Angel with her beloved new playmate

had an unspeakable desire to heap verbal abuse on her, beat her up, and kick her across the floor. This is how all over the world we hurt the injured. And when year after year you've been teaching this to students, it's indeed a good pedagogical lesson to suddenly "feel" how quickly you yourself can become part of the vicious circle of oppression. How quickly we became Connie's coalition of the willing! Slowly sinking with her out there in the swamps.

Most appalling for both of us was experiencing the close connection between abuse and racism. When we asked three-year-old Angel what she thought of blacks, she became utterly confused. "What do you mean by 'blacks'? Niggers? We shoot niggers, don't we, Mom?"

When the camera was running and her mother was sober, we could occasionally experience Connie becoming so self-conscious that she said "black" and sporadically tried to use that word in front of the child. This was interesting because it showed that the argument of Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma was valid in even the lowest strata of society, that is, there is a conflict between society's higher ideals—"e.g., we are all equal"—and the completely different messages parents nurture in their "gut" about "subhumans," which end up trickling into the child's unconscious.

We saw this even more clearly in Connie's relationship with 7-year-old Natasha. Connie thought it was okay that Natasha had caused some trouble in school because, Natasha explained, "The nigger sitting in front of me smelled." But Connie scolded Natasha because the school had just kicked her out for starting a gang with four other girls. I sensed something more going on and asked Natasha, "Was the gang to confront the blacks?" This was a difficult question because in itself the term black told Natasha I was on the side of "the niggers." So her answer wasn't quite as easy for her as when she'd theatrically repeated "Niggers smell!" A little later she became herself (rather than the well-behaved girl society wanted to see). She admitted that the four girls had lured a black boy into the woods and smashed his head with a rock until he was pouring blood. She visibly enjoyed describing this horrifying assault in graphic splatter language. Why had she done it? Because one day her mother, apparently in a moment of political correctness, had told her that "niggers bleed red just like us." It was Connie's way of telling her (when she was sober) that "we are all equal, so talk nice about your school friends." Natasha didn't believe this message, which contradicted all the other messages she'd gotten from her parents about "killing niggers" (usually when they were drunk). So she'd started a gang and wounded a boy to find out whether it was true. To this Connie simply replied, "It wasn't a nice thing to do, Natasha." But we'd all been drinking, and Connie said it with a big smile. She was obviously proud. So Natasha got the message that it was all right to smash a boy's head open with a rock to find out whether "niggers bleed red"!

Rarely have I seen such a classic lecture in the pedagogy of racism: This was the crushing "double-edged" killer's sword, the double message as it's practiced by the vast majority—that is, by us, the more ordinary "liberal" right-thinking people—constantly hammering "we are all equal," the American creed, and "Christian love" into our children. And yet, when the issue comes to people in "the inner city," blacks, homosexuals, Jews, Muslims, etc., we lift our eyebrows or change our voices a bit, without even being aware of it, and send the opposite message to the child, somebody is "not as equal." The child can't process such a double message with its hidden oppression and out of hurt and in confusion acts out in various racist patterns while growing up.

Connie somehow gave me hope for humanity, for she underscored what I'd always experienced among vicious criminals and even Ku Klux Klan members: One doesn't have to teach an adult like Connie about right and wrong (as Ivan insists in The Brothers Karamazov regarding living without a God). No, everyone knows that it's wrong to kill, to hate, to inflict pain. While being imprisoned in their own excruciating pain, however, they can't always live up to their higher ideals.

Since Connie better than anyone expressed our deeper common humanity, I couldn't help but feel a greater and greater affection toward (and joy around) her. She was this huge lump of explosive violence and hatred, with a peculiar mix of common sense, tenderness, and love, yet she held a deeply entombed desire to express the best of ideals.

I was happy to feel this fierce attraction to her since it somehow reminded me of the feelings I'd always nurtured for poor blacks as victims. That she herself was a victim became clear when we met Connie's desperately alcoholic and insane father (although Connie claimed there'd never been a directly incestuous relationship between them).

At some point the extent to which moral concepts had slipped from us after only a few days with Connie out in the swamps dawned on us. During the summer, John had caught a raccoon, which became a family pet. The children constantly rolled around in bed with their new toy and fed it crackers. I enjoyed taking baths in the insane mess of their "bathroom," because the raccoon—a "washing bear" in Danish—with its big tail helped wash me in the tub. It was so cute that Helle got the idea she could make a wonderful children's TV program about how it played with the mistreated children (at home she usually produced children's programs), but she'd run out of video tapes. That was my fault. Before our arrival I'd warned her, "This is a family so distraught that you can't directly interview them about their violence. Just let your camera run the whole time, especially when they're drunk, and you'll get the most shocking footage—they'll casually remark on all of their murders."

Angel was mistreating Connie, who was herself mistreated by her father to the right

When we ran out of tapes during the nights of "our drinking and killing sprees," Helle suggested erasing some of the previous tapes. And since murder and violence had after just a few days become the boring everyday "banality of evil," I told Helle that it was okay even though the reason I'd invited her in the first place was to record it all. Only when we were out on the highway did it dawn on us that she'd erased much of the evidence of a—even by American standards—shocking serial-murder story in favor of a trivial children's program.

This was a dreadful example of how quickly we'd been brainwashed into Connie's perverse logic of violence, which she herself best expressed when at one point she asked, "Tell me, are you writing a book about us?" I got defensive but replied honestly: "Perhaps someday, but I'll make sure to protect you all (from legal action)." "No, you don't have to worry about that," Connie said. "The only thing I wouldn't be happy for you to write about is that night when I broke into a restaurant with Woody and stole seafood out of hunger." She knew very well that burglary was illegal and had strong opinions about it since one of the "niggers" in the neighborhood had once stolen her chickens. But she didn't think of killing "niggers" in droves as illegal or wrong (when she was drunk)!

After a short time, apparently neither did we. This was another valuable lesson she taught me: Violent killers aren't created only by beating them in childhood. No, even the best and most righteous of us can be brainwashed into these roles in a short time as we know from soldiers and torturers all over the world – not to forget American police such as George Floyd's killer.

After warm hugs, we said goodbye to her and the kids in front of the dilapidated trailer with its plastic-covered windows. I knew I'd miss her—or at least the contact with the violent side of myself she'd exposed for me. A good reason to leave now was the presence of Connie's raving-mad father, who ruined every conversation with his sex-crazy fantasies about Helle. "Can you really sleep in the car with such a sexy blonde without having sex?" he kept asking. You often hear the truth from those

Nothing left of this beautiful young man I now saw brutalized in prison 5 years after

who are drunk or insane (he was both). He expressed openly what Americans usually imagine when I invite Danish women on my trips— also not to be seduced by the infatuation I can't help but have with my photographic victims (and vice versa), such as his daughter Connie.

Later in 1996

I'd been writing to Woody for several years and got permission from the prison to visit him. After almost 20 hours of driving, I arrived. As per usual in America, the high-security prison was located in a remote area few families could afford to drive to. Woody hadn't had a visit for five years and looked forward to our reunion as much as I did. But it was a shocking experience. After we both went through all sorts of security measures, Woody entered the visiting room chained hand and foot, his body looped with still more (and still thicker) chains. Trying to reach around this iron man felt like embracing a space alien. The beautiful "innocent" look I remembered, of a young boy with long bright locks, had been blown away. With his short hair, tattoos, his missing teeth (they'd been knocked out), and wounds on his arms, he was a creepy replica of Sean Penn in Dead Man Walking—but far, far worse. While I had a hard time believing in his mass murder stories that night five years ago, I was now able to believe everything about him. He'd been ferociously brutalized in this prison, which seemed far worse than Angola despite the latter's reputation for being the worst. And he'd spent half his time in the darkness of solitary confinement because of perpetual disciplinary offenses. How many fights, I asked. He counted twelve with black prisoners and three with whites—all life-or-death struggles. His 25-year sentence had been extended each time. But having ended up almost exclusively with blacks, he'd gained more respect for them. They could also fight back! He told me about how angry he'd been when he'd first—before I'd picked him up in 1991—shared a jail cell with a black man. He'd had a gun smuggled in and shot the "nigger." Not to kill him (years would've been added to his sentence). He'd shot him in the leg to get him moved from his cell.

That wasn't possible in this "high-tech" prison, and he'd learned to live with his black cellmate. "He does not fuck with me and I do not fuck with him." They never talked about race relations. Neither even knew what the other was in for. Sarah was the only one of his victims I knew, so I felt a special responsibility as her messenger. Since Woody had no recollection whatsoever of the night he'd stabbed her, he asked me to tell him in detail what had happened. "That poor girl," he said several times during our talk. About his "animal-like" behavior in the courtroom, when he'd threatened her, he could only remember that he'd been "an asshole" without even knowing that Sarah was present. I told him how important it had been for Sarah to see Woody's letter to me in which he asked for her forgiveness, and I asked whether he was ready for a victim-offender meeting to heal the wounds. After much deliberation, he replied that he wasn't ready for it. Then I made a terrible mistake. I said that Sarah had been more understanding than I'd expected because her own brother was in prison. Woody's efforts to think in compassionate terms were immediately crushed, and the killer in him emerged. "You have to give me the name of Sarah's brother," he demanded. "I've heard from inmates transferred from Angola that there's a prisoner here who's out to kill me. Here you have to kill or be killed." I knew the prisoner was probably Sarah's brother since, during my conversations with her, her other brother kept saying angrily, "If only I could get my hands on that guy!"

So now I was suddenly involved in a life-and-death struggle and realized that being a messenger, bridge builder, or man of reconciliation might not be as easy as I'd imagined. Like Our Lord Himself, I had to decide which of them was going to die! If I didn't reveal the name, it would be Woody, my friend, who'd one day probably have his throat cut from behind. I knew I wouldn't say the name to Woody, but I also knew that if I kept refusing I'd push him away.

Overall, meeting Woody again was a shocking experience. There were a number of reasons for this, one of which was that I had to review much of what I'd said about him in my slideshow. I could still glimpse the wounded child in Woody, but it was harder and harder not to see him with the judgmental eyes of society. I knew that I wouldn't have the courage to set this man free in his present state, but I also knew—as I kept reminding myself—that this condition was caused by this very same judgmental disposable society, not to mention the additional brutalization prison had subjected him to.

As difficult as it was to withhold Sarah's brother's name, it was almost as difficult not to tell Woody about Dawn, the only love of his life. That very morning I'd called Dawn's mother, Adeline; she was in shock. Dawn had attempted suicide the night before. She'd been found half-dead in a gas oven. Adeline had asked me not to tell Woody, but Woody kept asking me about her. And there was other news: Dawn had had a child with Woody's best friend. I knew Woody would want to kill him along with Sarah's brother.
In this brief account, I've merely hinted at some of the problems I'd run into in my attempt to be friends with all parties in an underworld of violence that has its own confusing rules. During the three-day drive back to New York through a depressing rain that lasted all three days, I didn't think of much more than this: MY American dilemma.

1998

Almost two years after I visited Woody, I received a surprising Christmas letter. It was from the worst of the three serial murderers—Woody's oldest brother, Sammy, whom I'd tried to visit in prison (also in 1996). As the leader of an Aryan gang, he continued murdering blacks in prison, e.g., by pouring gasoline on them and setting them on fire while they slept. Now he was apologizing that he hadn't replied to my letter. He was legally prevented, he said, since he'd spent two years in the "hole" for stabbing a black prisoner to death. Now,

however, he wanted to do something more creative and asked me whether some of my friends would be his pen pals. Several of my black friends in the area were his prison guards. After using them as references and waiting for many years, I finally got permission to visit Sammy. (The warden was a Christian who believed in forgiveness.) Unfortunately, after driving almost a week to get there, I found the prison under lockdown because of a swine flu contagion.

With a Black Woman in 2003

In 2003 I decided to take a black woman with me to see how the family would react. "I want to see whether they'll kill you too," I joked to Rikke Marott, a model from Denmark. "Jacob," she said nervously, "I'm a young black woman. You're a middle-aged white man. Half the men in these areas are in jail for killing or raping blacks." I replied, "They also kill whites." "That doesn't make it any better."

We first went to see Sammy's and John's mother, Rose. I wanted to hear more about her background. Rose said she came from an extremely poor family: "I grew up far out in the swamps, inhabited by almost no one but our family. Our house had only one room, where all nine of us slept. We were so poor we all had to stay home and help Mom and Dad work. Like most other poor people, we helped to work in the swamps as shrimp fishers.

Angel med breve til hendes mor om at være et bedre barn

Really hard work. Not until I was 13 did the authorities find us and send us to school, but I stopped after 5th grade because Mom and Dad needed us for work. So I never learned to read and write then."

Rikke pointed to her adorable young daughter on the wall. "Yes, my daughter there disappeared back in '67. She was 16. I got an anonymous call—a voice said she'd drowned in a harbor." Rikke asked, "Who was calling?"

"Maybe the killer, because no one else knew where she was. She was never found. That's the worst part." Her voice trembled and her eyes brimmed with tears. "It's 35 years ago, but I've never let go of the hope that she'll come back one day."

"What about your other children?"

"Our family is cursed. There've been so many murders and accidents—we are cursed. My stepson is in jail for attempted murder—he cut up a young girl's belly. She survived, but she'll never be able to have children."

When I interviewed Rose about how Woody's father had ripped out her uterus, she broke down in tears, embarrassed that I knew about it. After it had happened, she'd been so ashamed to be without a womb that she didn't go to the hospital for a month. Even then she only went because the bleeding was so severe. In the moments leading up to the tragedy, Vincent, who'd been drinking heavily, shouted, "I'll make sure you can never have children with another man!" Rose said she'd wanted to leave him, but before I turned off the camera, she went on to confess that she'd killed her husband with an axe. He hadn't "fallen out of bed" as everyone had told me. Becoming even more emotional, she talked about the murder of Woody's eldest sister. Adeline had told me in the spring that she'd committed suicide at the age of 16, after a long incestuous relationship with her father. Now Rose said that her daughter had, in fact, been murdered. Numb from hearing about all the murders we forgot to ask if it was also by the father, when she quickly continued.

"I have another son in prison for murder," Rose continued. "He killed people at random." She described in detail (and on video) all the killings but failed to mention the victims were all black. Rikke said later, "She's trying to protect me because I'm black, but she didn't have to. I felt comfortable with Rose. I could feel that she didn't care what color I am. What was important to her was that there was another human being who was trying to understand where she was coming from."

As we were getting ready to leave, I said, "Well, Rose, we're on our way out to visit John."

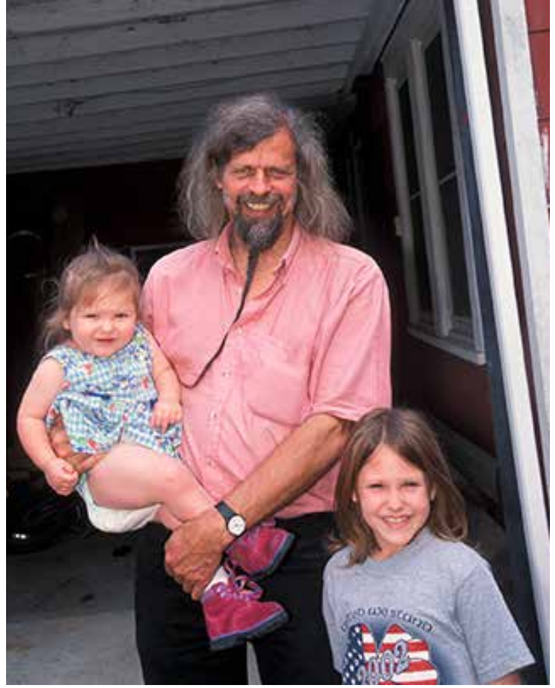
"John's wife is dead," Rose said. "Connie was killed last year in one of their drunken fights when she drove off in the car and crashed it. John's no longer a shrimp fisherman. He works on a boat and is away for days at a time. He's not in town right now."

"What about the kids?" I asked.

"They were taken by the authorities," Rose said. "My Christian daughter has the two youngest. The eldest, who's 17, lives with John and his new girlfriend."

I was shocked but not surprised. Connie's violent death was caused by a dangerous mix of cocaine, endless alcohol, and unhealed anger. I'd longed to see her again and was in tears as I made the long drive to visit her children. Would they even remember me after seven years? I was relieved when we drove up to their new home, "with a good Christian family," and, as if I were a dear uncle, Angel came running out and leapt into my arms with uncontrollable joy.

It's said that children can't remember anything from before the age of 2 or 3, but clearly she'd remembered me, arriving with my shame for having wanted to beat her



9-year-old Angel with her new sister Sally in 2003

Rose showing her picture of her son Sammy in prison to Rikke Marott

16-year-old Natasha loved Rikke Marott

With Natasha in 2003 shortly before she escaped from her father

John showing how the lawn got red from blood in 2009

when she was a toddler. Fortunately, this was not her lasting memory of me. Apparently, she'd experienced me in childhood as the only "sane" outsider to witness how deeply she'd been traumatized. Hers was a family that both whites and blacks had fled from out there in the swamps. Although I'd only been with the 2 and half-year-old Angel for one day in spring 1996 and for a few days in the fall when she was 3, I could now see how much our short visit at the time had meant for her now as a 9-year-old. She dragged me by the hand to meet her new family, to show me the younger sister she'd acquired and a love letter she'd written to her mother, now dead, promising to be "a good kid."

The 17-year-old Natasha, who'd nearly killed a black boy with rocks and had since spent two years in prison for other crimes, was equally enthusiastic about our reunion. She was also thrilled to meet Rikke, with whom she wanted to be photographed incessantly. They may have been brought up to "kill niggers," but their pain didn't discriminate against the color of the woman offering them love and the hope of soothing that pain. Rikke, who was adopted into a loving Danish middle-class family, came with all the surplus love these affection-deprived children were craving. On my subsequent visits over the years, they kept asking why I hadn't brought that "lovely colored woman" with me.

John with his stepson and grandchild Connie showing the guns he used for the killing the night before

2009

Yet, the family curse continued to haunt the children—John managed to get them back. He worked offshore, so I didn't see him again until 2009, now in another trailer with a little land around it. I came to expect surprises when visiting a serial murderer and figured I was in for another when I asked him why his lawn was red with blood. He answered with the rusty voice of a hardened older man:

"Well, Jacob, you know we always did crazy things when we got drunk. Last night I was so drunk I went out target shooting at my only cow. The cow got so frightened that it jumped the fence and ran off. I ran inside to get my rifle and got on my horse to chase it down. And after a wild midnight ride through town, I killed the damn bastard about five miles on the other side of town. And this morning I went with my 15-year-old stepson out to get it in the pick-up truck. We've just been butchering it here on the bloody lawn."

I replied, "Well, at least you're not killing blacks anymore."

"No, we all mellow out when we get older. I think I stopped that around the time I met you."

I was so relieved his youthful (and lethal) anger had subsided that this time I went shrimping with him deep in the swamps, where for the first time we had time to really talk about his life and his violent fights with Connie, which in the end had cost her

John with Natasha's youngest abandoned child

Angel at two with her uncle Woody who later raped her

her life. What saddened me was that both of his daughters, whom I'd come to see, had disappeared.

Natasha had fled from him around the time I saw her last and now had two children, whom she'd dumped with John. He didn't know where she was; "probably in jail again," he guessed. And Angel was now in prison. Woody had, after 16 years, been released on parole and moved in with John. He'd raped 13-year-old Angel and made her into a drug addict. John was so furious that he put his own brother back in prison—this time for life—for breaking parole. Angel was no saint either. At 13 she'd stolen a car to take some of her friends to a McDonald's and was sentenced to a juvenile facility. She escaped a year later by stealing one of their yellow school buses. I have no idea how she, small as she was, could even have reached the foot pedals. Perhaps she couldn't since she crashed the bus, totaling it. She was now serving a sentence of several years in a prison so far away John couldn't afford to go there. John, I observed, along with his new wife, was trying do a better job of bringing up his two granddaughters than he'd done with his daughters. One had been named Connie after their dead grandmother. I felt that John was now on the right track and was more worried about Natasha and Angel.

2012

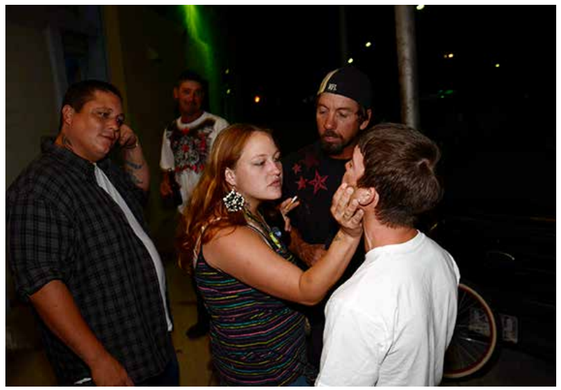
I didn't locate Natasha until 2012. She contacted me because she wanted my help in sending her father to prison. She'd learned from Rose, her grandmother, that it was actually John who'd committed the murder in the marketplace for which her uncle Sammy was serving a life sentence. Although Natasha had never met Sammy, she felt it was unconscionable for him to be locked up when she knew that her own father had killed far more blacks. I'd never understood why Sammy had gotten life for murdering a black father in front of his family when Woody clearly says on my tape that it was John who committed the crime. (Sammy's conviction had been the reason I'd often doubted Woody's story.) John had even shown me how he'd twisted the knife in his victim's heart. Since there were so many witnesses to the crime, Sammy and John knew that one of them would be going to prison. According to Natasha, the brothers made a deal on the spot. Sammy offered to take the rap "because you, John, are trying to raise a family. I have no children and am wanted for so many other things that I'll end up in prison anyway." Wow, I thought. Because of this bizarrely honorable deal, struck to prevent Natasha from being fatherless, Natasha wanted her own father in prison.

She was now 23 and I felt this was the time to ask her how much she could remember of the murders that had occurred in her childhood. I set a video camera up in front of us in a noisy backyard behind the shack she lived in. She insisted that we first buy a bottle of whisky: "I have so much to tell you."

At first it seemed as if she had for so long suppressed the memories that they re-emerged only with difficulty, but after a couple of hours, I got the idea to play a sound clip from the digitalized show I'd made 20 years earlier with her uncle Woody. When I played this tape, she broke down in tears and began shaking violently while I held her. It was like it opened deep wounds from her childhood, and she told me how often she'd helped cleanse the car of blood after John had been out "killing niggers" and some of the murders she herself had heard him brag about.

"We were on the road, and this black guy in a little Honda cut dad off. Dad chased him down and clipped him. I watched this nigger fucking tumble out in the ditch—Dad literally clipped him at 50 miles per hour. Dad was just sitting there laughing, saying that this motherfucking bitch is not going to cut anybody else off. So a day later it came on the radio, that if there were any witnesses to come forward. There was a

With Nastasha during our therapeutic conversation in 2012



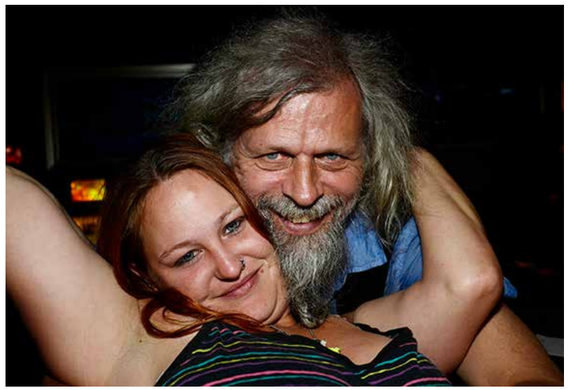
Natasha with her crazy meth cooking friends in "the hole" same evening

Natasha and Angel in family photo

reward and everything."
"So, you heard it on the radio, and you knew it was your father."
"Yes, I was there with him."
"And then you felt remorse. Was that the first time you felt something was wrong?"
"Yes, about the only time I ever thought anything was wrong—because I saw it with my own eyes."
"Only because he was wanted for it?"
"I don't know if it was because he was wanted for it, but I was there and saw it all. I am not a violent, violent person. Don't get me wrong. I have a lot of anger issues, and if somebody pisses me off, they will see the worst of me, but I am not a cold-blooded killer. Dad will fucking look you in the eye and stab you—just for standing there. He has no guilt, no remorse."
"But didn't you know it was wrong to kill people?"
"No, we were fucking raised to kill niggers, so how could I? Not until I was around 14 and heard that on the radio did I start turning against my dad. And shortly after I saw you and the nice colored lady last time, I ran away from home."

I felt a pang of conscience, because she now wanted to use my tape of Woody as evidence in court against her own father. She loved him but now saw him as a remorseless killer. And yet John had over the years become my trusted friend. He would tell me anything, but I somehow always thought or hoped that he was just bragging. Also, I always saw him as a victim.
The whisky and the horrific bloody details got us both increasingly excited. Sitting next to me in front of the camera, she began to kiss and hug me (eagerly photographed by her new boyfriend – the father soon after of her third child). She did this more and more—a reaction to the joy of lifting from her heart something she'd repressed for so long. As she talked about her father, she kept justifying his actions with phrases like "My dad didn't want to be fucked over by the niggers." I picked up a few more clues about John's past in her language, but it was she herself who casually mentioned his rape.
"Your dad was raped? By whom, his father?"
"Yes, he was raped as a child. Before he was thirteen. And Sammy too. All the time."
"How do you know that?"
"Because my dad told me when he was drunk."
"How did he tell you?"
"We talked about a lot of things, and he said he'd been taken advantage of as a child. I said, 'What do you mean, taken advantage of?' One time he said, 'Baby, the reason I was so overprotective of you when you were young was because of what happened to me when I was a child.' He wouldn't go into detail—why would he? He's a grown man. So, I didn't ask for more. Certain things guilt me and him. As father and daughter, we can curse each other out, but when it comes down to it, we will stand back to back and fight through such things without showing emotions."

Natasha talking about her father's killings



Natasha and friends in the late-night bar where I drink tequila shots from Natasha's breasts

Later that night I would see that such feelings are acted out in different ways. We were both emotionally devastated after these day-long revelations, during which she, as an eyewitness, had confirmed the gruesome murders of blacks Woody had told me about 20 years earlier. More importantly, she'd also given me the deeper explanation for it all: it was rooted in deep unhealed anger, itself stemming from the constant rape of two small children or young boys.

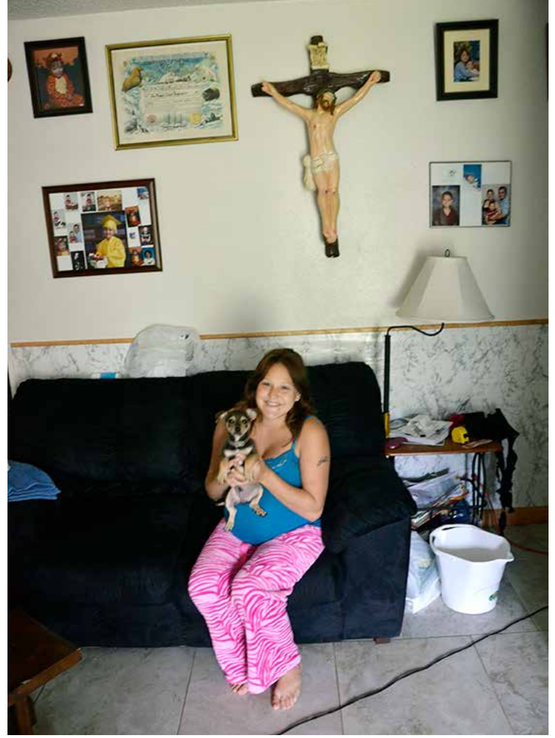
We were completely exhausted at the end of the day, but Natasha now insisted that I take her to the liquor store. After that, she wanted to take me "into the hole," which I knew was the worst place in America. Down in the hole (hang out for criminal addicts), we were joined by her friends—the wildest scariest crack heads and meth-cookers I'd ever seen. With Natasha now clearly out of her mind, one of them forced us into my rental car (me in the back seat and Natasha in the front). The wildest ride of my life was about to begin. We drove 100 miles an hour through the streets—against the traffic on one-way streets and through dark alleys, often with garbage cans flying around us just like a Hollywood chase scene. Several times Natasha tried to throw herself out the door at full speed. At first, I thought, "Damn! Why didn't I take out insurance on the rental car at the airport in Atlanta?" A little later, I thought, "Why didn't I get life insurance?" I was absolutely certain that with such a drunk and doped-up driver my life was about to end exactly the same way it had for Natasha's mother. Late at night, after a high-speed chase over many rivers and swamps, we ended up in an empty bar where Natasha woke up. Taking out her knife, she demanded shots for all of us and insisted I drink them from a glass squeezed between her breasts. Local tradition, I think they said. I felt safer among their knives than I did driving with them, so I postponed the ride home until Natasha had passed out. She seemed so "dead" we thought she'd had a heart attack. We carried her out to the car and drove home, where, at 5 in the morning, we carried her enormously heavy body—it resembled her mother's with all the weight she had now gained —into the living room. I then fled the crime scene, relieved that I was alive but fearing that the police would show up and compare the dents in my car with the things we'd wrecked that night. Natasha, as it happened, was pregnant and soon after gave birth. When she landed in prison again, this child was also taken from her.

Carrying Natasha home at 5 in the morning

Later the same day, luck was with me and I found Angel in a distant town. I hadn't seen her for almost 10 years (she'd been in prison) and was again surprised that she came running out to embrace me in the same way she had when she was 9. Now 19, she was pregnant. Her husband was a rough Hell's Angel type resembling the young prison-brutalized Woody. Natasha hadn't announced my arrival since they no longer stayed in touch. When I mentioned Natasha

Angel pregnant with her temporary husband in 2012

Connie beating up Angel - “the bad one” - in 1996



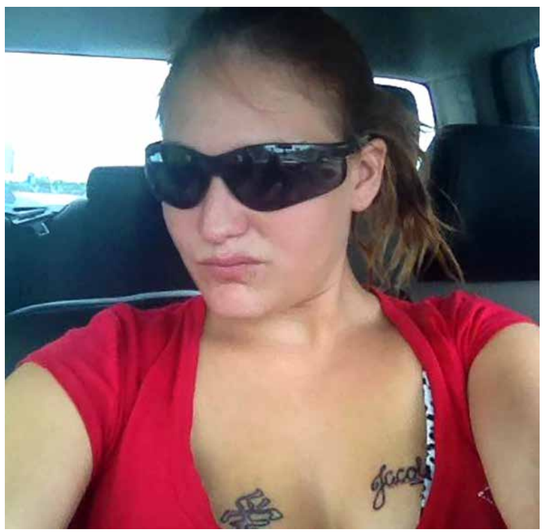
Pregnant Angel happy in home of her parents in law 2012

wanted their father in prison, Angel couldn’t understand why, but then she’d been too young to witness all the killings. At 2 she’d only learned the words she’d remember as her first—“We kill niggers”—without understanding what they meant. After years of acting out the rage of her parents, dooming her to be “the bad one, ”she’d been released from prison and wanted to start a family. Sitting there interviewing her, I was again struck by how small she was. She was hopeful about the future, and before I left, she asked me to take some pictures of her with the man she’d married in John’s house. Although she was now living relatively comfortably with her – as it later turned out – abusive husband’s parents, she clearly did not want me to leave.

For the next eight years, Angel sent me one desperate letter after another despite the fact that she was barely able to write. First about the birth of their two children, with the exact size and weight of each, then about how her husband had left her and how she’d ended up in a trailer as rundown as the one she’d been born in—dirt poor and alone with her two children. Then came one cry for help after another from various prisons after her children had been forcibly removed. When I asked about Natasha, all she knew was that she was also in prison.

More recently, having served out her sentence, Angel found a new husband, had a baby with him, and seemed fairly happy. Now she sends me cries for help when John, her father, has been hospitalized—a result of years of heavy drinking. “Dad wants to see you. Please come back, Jacob. I’ll pay the airfare.” It’s obvious that she has no idea how far away Denmark is or how expensive such a ticket is.
During the last few years, their last hope has been President Trump, and Angel’s new husband writes long posts on Facebook about “the unfair treatment Trump got after all he has done for us poor people.”

With my feeling that this traumatized family has been unfairly treated by all of us winners in society, one thing my 30-year friendship with them has taught me is the importance—no matter how little time we have left over from our busy careers—to intervene as saving angels on behalf of the abused and neglected children around us. For even though I only spent a few days with Angel when she was 2–3 years old, she never forgot me, as she made clear one day when she was 9 and one afternoon when she was 19. To this day she constantly writes and calls me, and now even has my name tattooed on her breast (as seen here).



Divorced and alone with two children and a Jacob tattoo 2018

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

Andel del
Ghettoen i vore hjerter

Romerbrevet 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

Ghettoen i vore hjerter

Thirty years of racism workshops for American students has reaffirmed my belief in people's basically good intentions. They'll gather food for the ghettos or hold hands all across America, as did the students seen below, for racism today has little to do with skin color or religion.

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

Thus, it's their different behavior we "blame" and "distance ourselves from" in our caste hierarchical thinking.

This different behavior, however, is a direct result of how we for centuries excluded blacks in the U.S. and Roma in Europe. Or a behavior shaped by oppressive cultures and dictatorships, which many Muslim immigrants and former Eastern European Jews already exhibited when they arrived.

Our self-understanding as "liberal-minded" northerners is therefore seriously tested when we suddenly face an immigrant from outside "our" territory, someone whose behavior is incomprehensible in terms of "our values."

Here in Part 2 we'll look at how, regardless of our good intentions, we tend to react when millions of poor (Christian) blacks from the American South or immigrants from poor Muslim countries seek refuge in the north in the hope of finally being regarded as equals.

Do we live up to our lofty ideals and include them in our community? Or do we escape from the challenge into "evasive racism" and force them into a ghetto, whether actual or psychological?

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 lack of understanding among people toward the suffering which is all around them. People in the North talk about the poverty in the South, but are unable to see the poverty in their own ghettos. People in the East talk about the Indian poverty in the West without seeing their own black poverty; people in the West talk about the blacks' poverty in the East, but don't see the Indians' poverty on their own doorstep. And in the South they don't talk about poverty at all.

I saw a striking example of this blindness in Mississippi when I got a lift with a representative of the usual optimistic type. He talked on and on about how this was a country with opportunities for all. Everyone can be successful, if only they want to. Anyone can become a millionaire in ten years. If you have the strength and desire you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps. I hear the same phrases so often while riding down a road with shacks on both sides, that I probably wouldn't have paid any attention to it if we had not on that particular day been passing through a completely flooded stretch of the delta. It was in the poorest part of Mississippi, where you see almost nothing but tin-roofed shacks inhabited by poor tenant farmers, whose only property is often just a mule and a couple of pigs. The Mississippi River had recently overflowed its banks and a lot of drowned mules and pigs were lying along the road. People sat on the roofs of their shacks, and in some places only the chimney stuck up above water. Others rowed around their houses in boats trying to save their drowning mules.

One day I was strolling down the street in Detroit with a black woman who had been a Black Panther when she was sixteen, but who was now a Trotskyite and a feminist. We were on our way to a Trotskyite meeting, so it must have been on a Friday. I always go to such meetings on Fridays in the big cities, as they usually serve free coffee and cake. On Sundays and Wednesdays I usually go to coffee get-togethers in the churches. At a church it normally takes only an hour before you get your coffee, but with the Trotskyites you really have to go through hell before you get your final reward. Often you have to sit through a stiff three-hour sermon about saving the "masses," but then on the other hand you throw yourself upon the cake with that much more joy afterward. Well, on this Friday, when we were on our way to our cake-for-the-masses meeting, we passed a beggar on the street standing with an outstretched hand. Then the thing I least expected happened: the woman totally spurned the beggar, knocking his hand away. I was rather shocked and asked her why she had not given him any money, since I knew she had some. "That kind of nonsense has to wait until after the revolution," she replied. I thought it over a bit and then asked slightly provocatively, "Well, but what if the revolution doesn't come in his lifetime?" There was no more talk on the subject.

In contrast to the middle class, from which these two instances come, people in the upper class are often touchingly helpful toward the poor and their sufferings, if they accidentally catch sight of them. I encountered a stirring example of this in Gainesville, Florida, when I lived with a rich man who owned an insurance company. One day I went with him when he was out helping a tenant farmer pull his only mule out of a mud hole it had fallen into. The tenant farmer was standing down in the mud hole in water up to his neck, struggling to keep the mule's head above water, while the rich man sat up in his helicopter trying to hoist the mule out. The situation was so much like a cartoon in a communist newspaper that I couldn't help laughing, but neither the proletarian nor the capitalist could see the fun in it. It would be perfect if the rich man himself fell into the mud hole, I was thinking. My pious hope in fact came true, for shortly after, when he landed and approached the water hole, he slipped in the mud and unluckily broke his leg. Since he would have to stay in bed for some time, I was allowed to borrow his Mercedes, and it was during one of my drives in it that I found Linda's shack far out on a deserted back road.

One day the playboy millionaire Tommy Howard (page 170) picked me up in his Jaguar and took me to a fancy ski resort where he spent tons of money scoring "girls".

Yet he was so impressed by my vagabond slogan, "Security is being on the road with no money", that he first gave me keys to his fancy home, but soon after found his dating life so empty that he sold all his business to "live by your vagabond philosophy" and spent the next 7 years hitchhiking and travelling all over the world. In Africa he made his first black friend ever. The irony was that he lived in a town 50% black but had never had a black in his house except for those I came hitchhiking with.

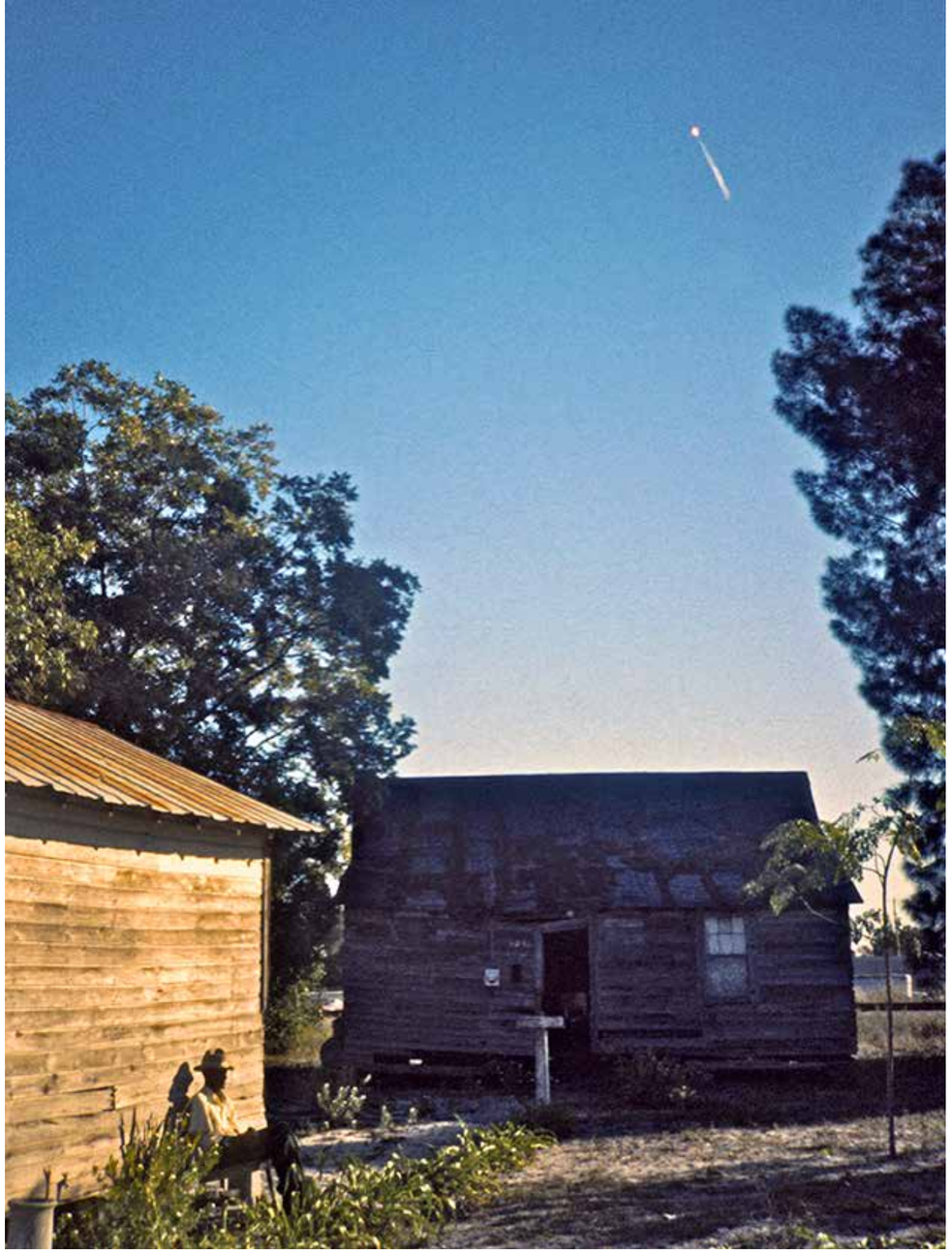
Whether you have nothing or too much money it is arrogant blindness towards all those who through misfortune have been forced into homelessness and poverty. That Tommy since could switch to a huge motorhome in which he wrote his travel book "The Freedom Machine" – while I since could travel around in my customized van lecturing on "the freedom to say yes" – again demonstrated our shared white privilege in an unfree society.

From letters

1973 - flooding in the delta around Greenwood, MS

1974 - NYC

1973 - NYC



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

Celestial Aspirations Amidst Terrestrial Desolation

"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 to be guest of honor at the launch of a moon rocket.

He declined because he refused to believe a man could reach the moon.

One morning, in an area near his home where I still occasionally hitched rides on mule-drawn wagons, I saw, through the cracks of the shack I'd stayed in, a rocket. But this old man, Cape Canaveral's closest neighbor, didn't notice as the rocket slowly ascended over his dilapidated shack. He had neither electricity nor a radio to inform him of this billion-dollar project. Even if he'd been told, he was too malnourished, too sick to lift his head and watch the rocket.

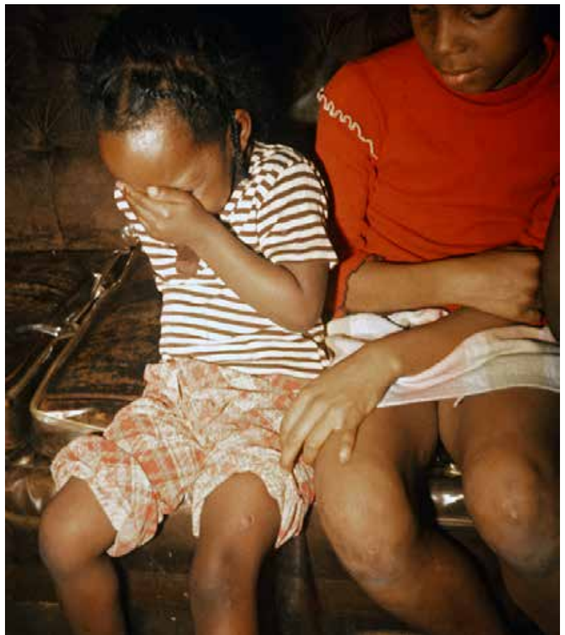
Below both from 1972 - Lower East Side, NYC

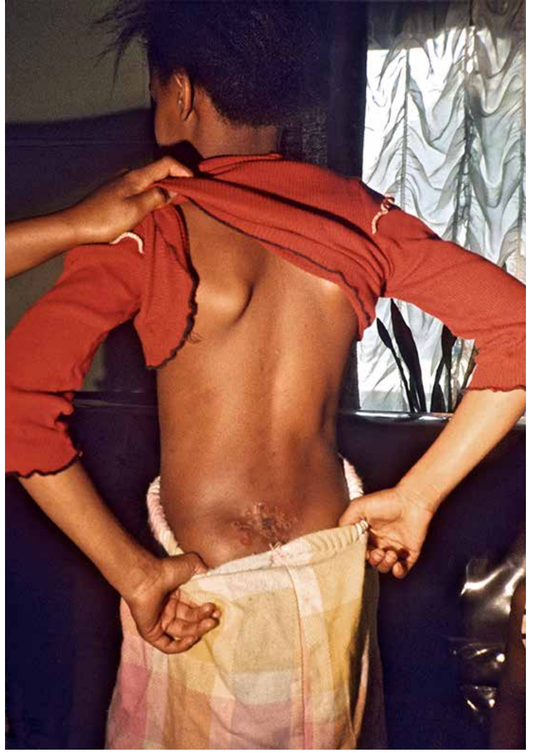
1974 - Bronx, NY

WHITEY ON THE MOON

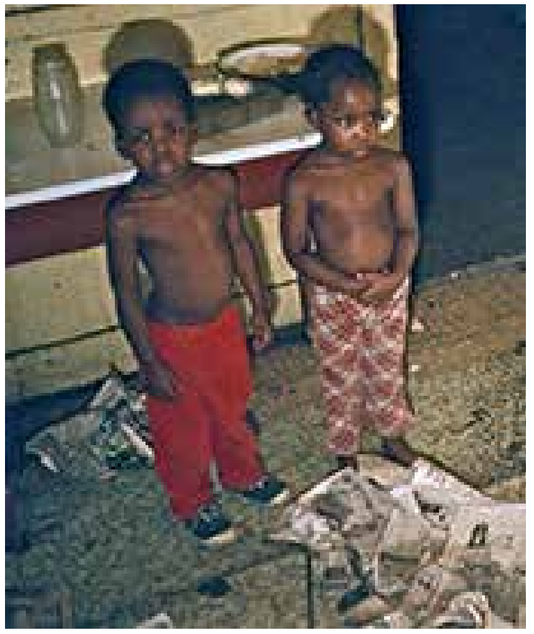
A rat done bit my sister Nell
with whitey on the moon
her face and arms began to swell
and whitey's on the moon.
I can't pay no doctor bills
when whitey's on the moon
ten years from now I will be paying still
while whitey's on the moon,
You know, the man just upped my rent last night
because whitey's 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 a flag was planted on the moon. I stayed with a family in Detroit, and four of the children were bitten by rats while sleeping. Their weeping was drowned out by the motorists tearing along the highway right outside the house. Trapped in our own system, we whites must drive superhighways to get from our protected suburbs to our jobs downtown without being confronted by the rats, misery, and violence in the ghettos. What has so suppressed our natural love for other people that we literally drive over the less fortunate without a thought?
(As a busy lecturer years later, I did too.)

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

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

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 busy highways, you see society differently than the motorist. Arriving from the South on a late-winter night, you're startled by the speed of traffic. You see cars passing overhead on the elevated highways and realize that your only chance of survival is to get up the numbing speed. You try to climb the ice-covered slopes but slide back. The Southern dream of leaving the "unbearable heat of injustice and oppression" turns into a nightmare when you realize that the slopes do not lead to the "leveled valleys and flattened mountains" of Dr. King's dream.

Eventually, you give up your Sisyphean climb and wander in the shadow of the dark pillars under the highways. Although the pillars resemble the Greek pillars in front of the plantation homes and might imprison you in a new ghetto, you still have hope. You don't yet realize that you're entering a divided world, a terrifying realization of H.G. Wells' The Time Machine populated by two races. The Eloi are creatures of light, for whom life is a game except at night, when they are threatened by subterranean creatures of darkness, the Morlocks.

As a vagabond, you see the terrifying dystopia of our unequal society—the forced ghettoization of the millions of blacks who migrated with hope to the north, just as today's poor immigrants are attracted to Europe. You may see it a more human way than the sociologist. The friends holding my book have not had upward mobility since I met them 42 years ago. They are stuck in the same shacks, generation after generation, locked in a perpetual underclass, literally being run over by busy drivers and rumbling trucks.

These elevated highways symbolize not only the struggle of poor immigrants against an inhumane system, but also the powerlessness of those of us who drive through increasingly misanthropic cities. It was our racism that destroyed thriving historic black business districts by plowing highways through them in order to commute to jobs in the inner city.

In the South, it was easier to see caste oppression as the fault of "the other," but in the North, I soon saw the concrete beams with my own eyes. Shortly after my non-committal life as a vagabond, I, as a lecturer, drove over "the others" myself, just as the ghetto residents must to reach work in the industrial areas.

Or I flew across the country with businessmen who were almost exclusively white—typically talking about their "best black friend" while avoiding selling their goods, bank loans, insurance, etc. in the ghettos. It became even clearer that I was now part of the power structure I once criticized when I was picked up at airports by uniformed black drivers in stretch limousines, accoutered with bars and TVs—and through the darkened windows saw my former black friends standing out there in the ghettos we were passing.

All oppression is about power and responsibility, and we constantly swap the roles of oppressor and oppressed.

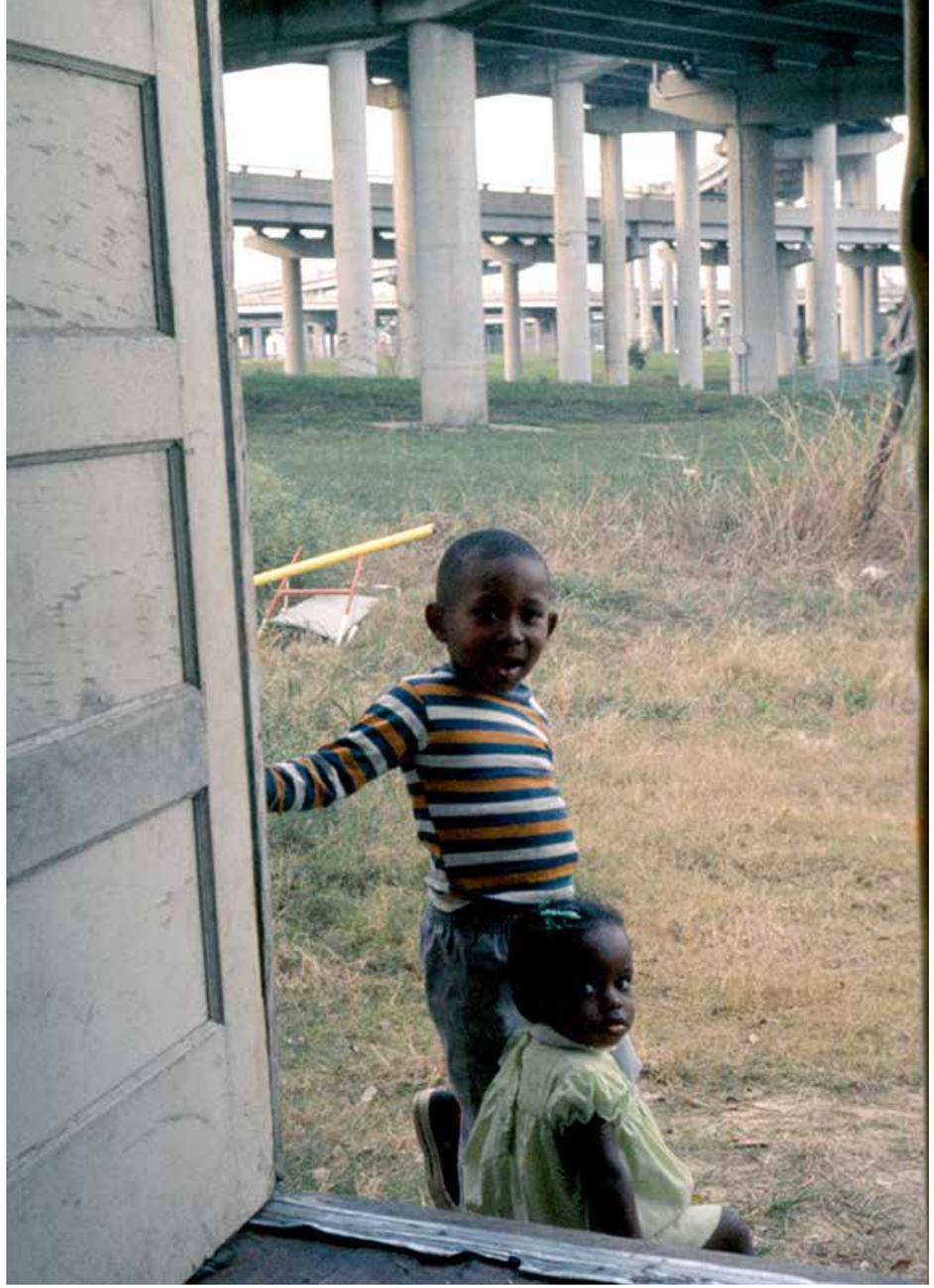
1973 - Baton Rouge, LA

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

"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

Our destructive flight – both at home and abroad

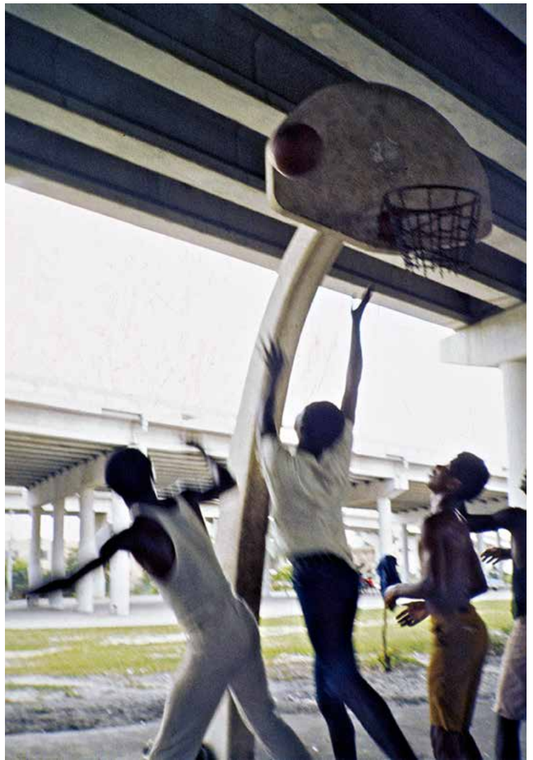
The world cannot afford our uncontrolled consumption, which traps us in a vicious circle wherein seemingly sensible decisions—like military intervention to secure oil—are merely symptoms of a deeper problem.

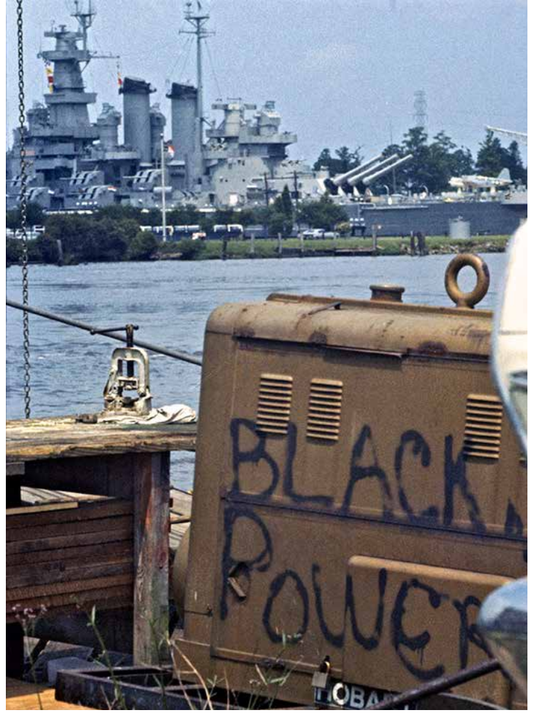
We don't like to be reminded of the banality that we, a fraction of the world's population, have contributed to catastrophic levels of CO_2 emissions in just a century. Or that we accomplished this by plundering the earth's cheap energy sources. The media bombard us with messages that exhort us to buy bandages to soothe our aching wounds and "get away from it all," cynically blinding us to our environmental and "climate racism." This climate-related tyranny occurs when the most vulnerable communities, often made up of people of color, bear the brunt of climate change while the least-impacted continue to consume without regard. We dodge responsibility and show contempt for the future of brown children, both at home and abroad. We insist on driving our children, in climate-damaging SUVs, to remote private schools—in the US, away from black children and in Denmark, away from brown children. This vicious circle results from our attempt to escape from the poverty and suffering we ourselves have created. It is a chaotic escape that drowns in the music and messages about the material goods we "need," goods that create an even greater need for escape. Fleeing whites spend more on a ski weekend than their counterparts in the underclass can earn in a week. While in one sense this makes us oppressors, at the same time we feel trapped by the system and are essentially as unhappy as our victims.

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?

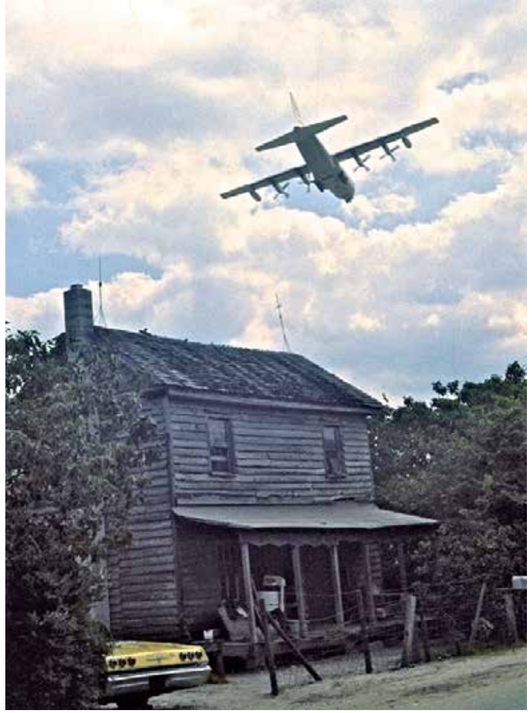
Give more power to the people song by The Chi-Lites - illustrated

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

Our consumption is a vicious circle that creates artificial needs.

The consequences of our behavior are already affecting livelihoods in developing countries, which are suffering from droughts and floods as well as climate-exacerbated conflicts over water and land. Millions of climate refugees are being driven toward our shores, and when politicians in wealthy countries focus on meeting voters' short-term interests—at the expense of sustainable solutions—our democracies are challenged.

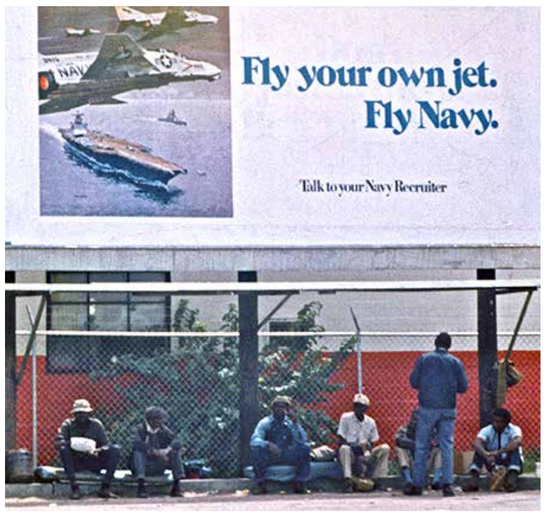
It's trite to point out that it's not only politicians selling hot air to developing countries; WE, with our cynical egotism, are pushing these problems onto our children.

Do we want to deprive them of empathy and decency until they eventually feel compelled to construct walls and station the military along the border to keep climate refugees out and our own marginalized populations in?

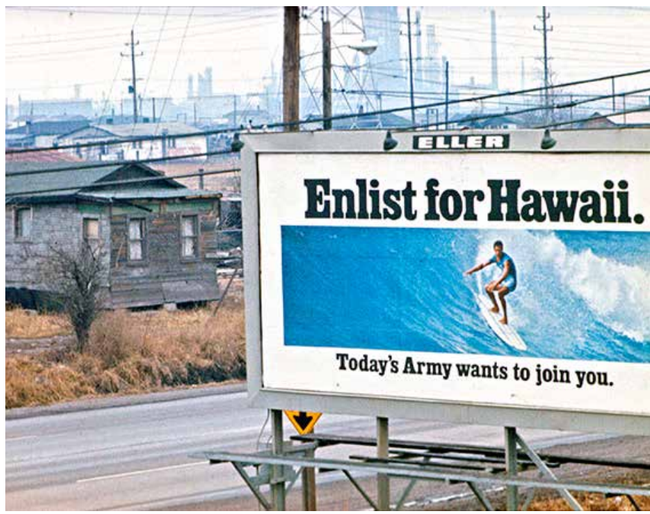
While my parents' generation celebrated the US military for liberating us during World War II, my generation saw the US supporting numerous dictatorships in the Third World.

My prejudice against the US military lasted until Clinton's interventions in Haiti and Kosovo, where I actively "integrated" into the US military in hopes that it could become a tool to maintain democracy and freedom—as we see in Ukraine.

"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



1973 - Richmond, VA



1974 - Charleston, SC

Our Military-Industrial Theft From the Poor

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

But when does the cost of military armament become too high?
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. Every morning, through her grimy windows, she sees warships being built.

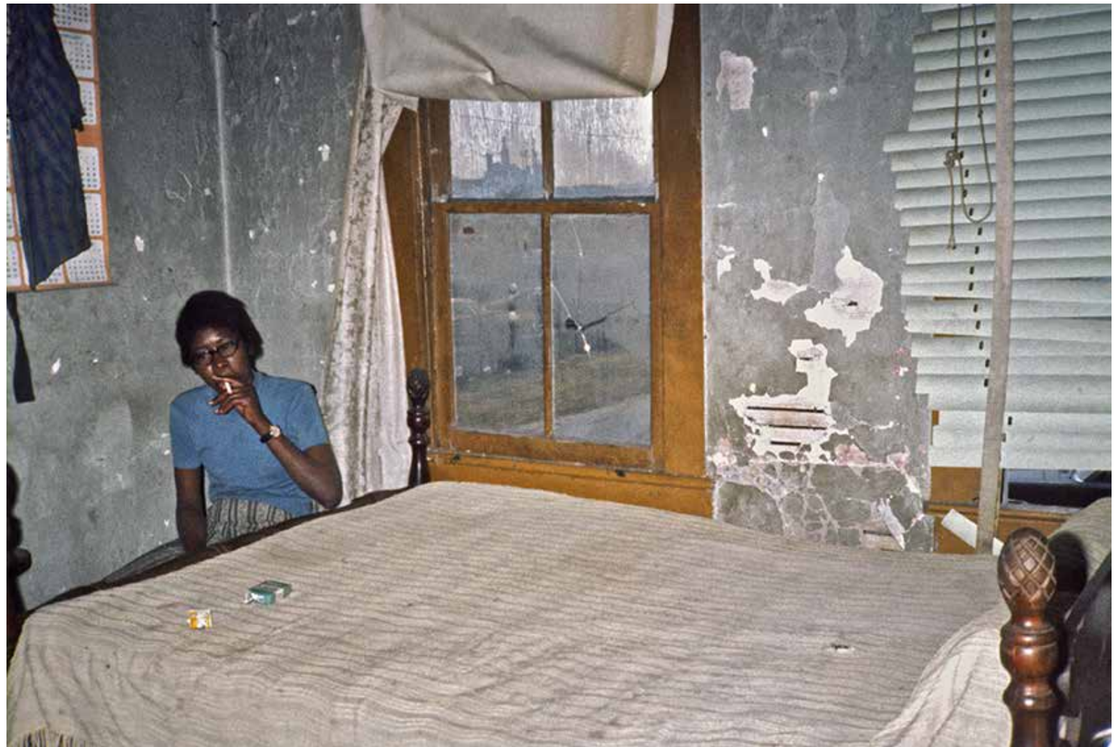
Lacking a TV (she has no electricity), her only entertainment is to watch the Navy build a vessel that burns twenty times more energy in one minute (267 gallons) than her oil lamp would use in one year (12 gallons).
As Eisenhower warned about the military-industrial complex:
Every gun that is made, every 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.

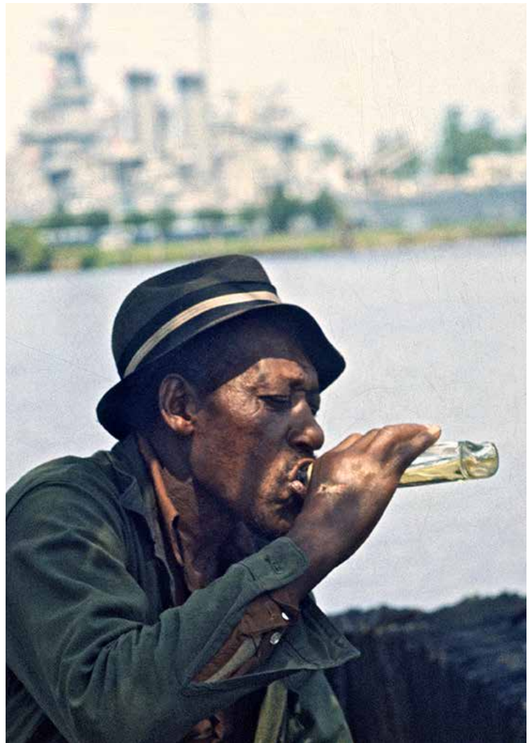
Both from 1973 - Norfolk, VA

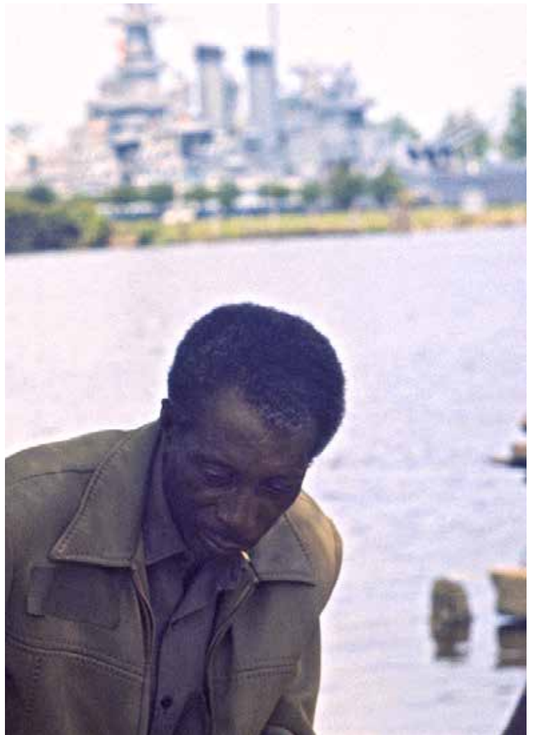
Statesmen are trying to see who's got
the power to kill the most.
When they are tired of power
the world is going to be a ghost.
They know we're not satisfied
the way they scream and holler.
They give us a promise
and throw in a few more dollars.
There's no price for happiness,
there's no price for love.
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

1991 - Bronx, NY

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 an impotent protest against the dominant caste's use of political and economic power to dump poor blacks next to the landfills where whites dump their toxic waste–in places such as the South Bronx, East Los Angeles, and Southwest Detroit, resulting in respiratory disease, groundwater contamination, and declining property values. Not to mention asthma, cancer, and birth defects among the blacks who have been pushed into Louisiana's "Cancer Alley," Pennsylvania's Chester, and Maryland's Curtis Bay—ghettos next to reeking oil refineries and chemical plants. Or the backyard dumping in the historic black neighborhoods of Atlanta's West End and Vine City, Alabama's North Birmingham, or as seen here in South Chicago.

Today, the world's richest man, Elon Musk, is building one of the world's most energy-intensive supercomputers – in the middle of a historically black neighborhood in Memphis. His company, xAI, is powering the computer with gas-fired turbines, approved without the consent of the poor residents. For years, they fought to have the old toxic factories removed, and now they are being suffocated 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. And once again, it is black children who have to pay the price when a billionaire lets them breathe poison in pursuit of digital immortality. No accountability. Just another white man with money dumping noise, heat, and poison in a black neighborhood that, as the newspapers wrote, "had done nothing wrong."

The privileged whites often only discover their own ignorance of 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.

Similarly, we in developed nations dump millions of tons of electronic waste, contaminated with lead, mercury, and cadmium, in Africa. We scatter plastic throughout Asia, while old ships fraught with asbestos, lead paint, and heavy metals go to Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India as scrap. Our medical and radioactive waste wind up in Central America, and we continue to destroy Africa's textile industry by buying tons of unnecessary and climate-destroying clothing and then dumping it as used clothing. Without regard for our actions, we systematically "dump" our waste both at home (in ghettos) and abroad (in poor countries).

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 ...

1978 - NYC

Disposable Society song by
Esther Philips - illustrated

Christmas in New York

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

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

This year I had just hitch-hiked in from Alabama, but couldn't find any of my friends and ended up on the street down in the Bowery on Christmas Eve. I got to talking with a bum who had lighted a fire to keep warm. He must have been a bum for a long time, for his curly hair was all in knots which could not possibly be combed out. We soon became good friends. He was one of those bums who can talk; the worst are the bums who can only communicate through the 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 which 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 started 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 which smashed 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 having put 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 about it to Larry. 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 shadow-boxing 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 quick as lightning, 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 does not have animosity toward men that 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 to see 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 a bit uncomfortable if a new guest went right to their refrigerator and ate all the 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, which usually is 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 has an ad in the sex magazine Screw, which apparently all businessmen read— because the phone rings incessantly.

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 left 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 over

1973 - NYC

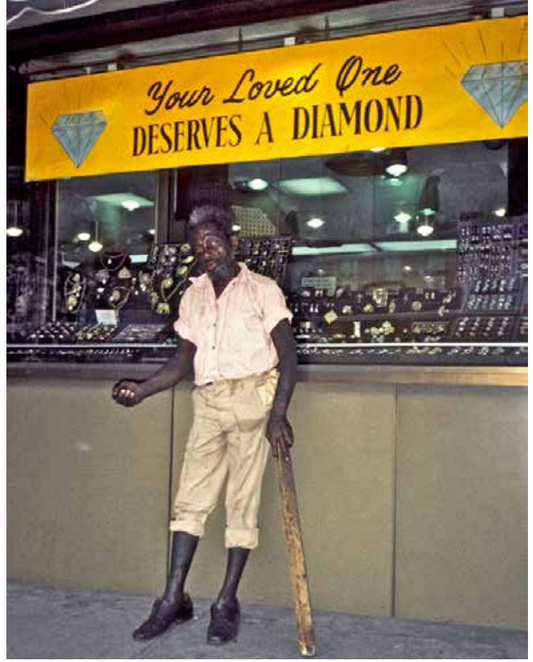
because there was a white man being attacked by several blacks and Puerto Ricans right outside; two police cars and an ambulance came immediately. This trick is common in New York, but it seems to work every time. I have often seen Erica give a whole day's wages to people in need. She took the money 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 that 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 himself had the courage 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, while 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 have 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 the South to disposable humanity in New York

"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 is made into a sales item and the humanity in us is sold out, one begins to sense the dark side of our minds that created the ghetto.

My vagabonding in the world's most advanced disposable system became an inward journey during which I couldn't always distinguish human beings from the system they inhabited. I had to ask myself whether the warmth and openness I received as a vagabond was a genuine American characteristic or whether the system had given the population a superficial hospitality, a need for disposable friendship. But to be 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 and cruel (such as in South Africa during apartheid), you often find the greatest human warmth—a warmth that shouldn't be thrown away in the search for a more just system. Though I found life in the Northern states more just than in the South, I constantly had to hitchhike back to the humanness of the South in order to survive as an individual (many blacks return for the same reason). The more liberal North invited blacks to migrate there in the 1940's and '50s because it needed labor, just as Northern Europe invited brown "foreign workers" in the '60s. But we didn't need them as human beings, and gradually isolated and abandoned them in huge, overpopulated ghettos. Our growing insecurity and fear under globalization today leave a deep accumulating pain, which is rapidly changing the world scene. Never before in history have we been so actively involved in forcing so many people into ghettos. What it took us 500 years in Europe to accomplish with the Jews we've achieved in only a few decades with millions of Muslims. Ghettoization ultimately leads to ethnic cleansing, as we've seen in many countries. But only in a few places has a minority become as ghettoized as blacks are in the United States. In many cities, such as Detroit and Chicago, up to 94% of blacks are trapped in all-black neighborhoods.

Our disposable society, with its backyard dumping, of both things and human beings, has killed love by isolating and alienating huge sections of the population. But it can't strangle the scream of pain and emptiness from those we disposed of—as can be discerned everywhere in the ghetto and the underground.

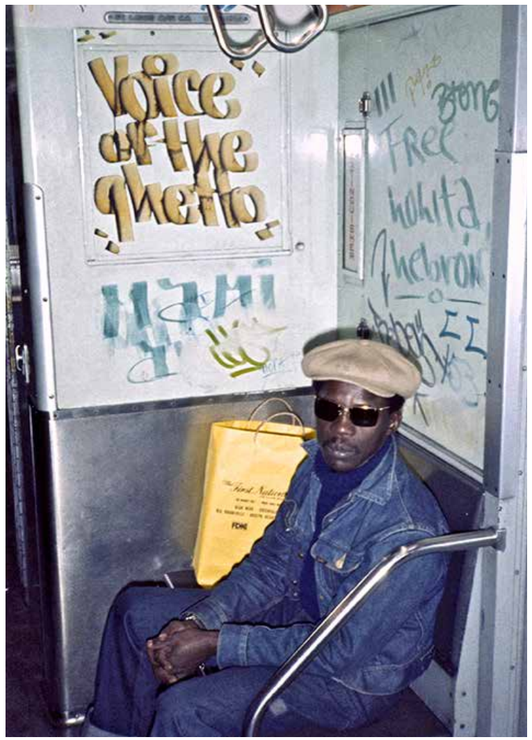
Voice of the Ghetto

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 in order to help ghettos and underdeveloped countries "up." But when election day comes in the U.S., all their promises wind up in the status quo wastebasket with votes for the Democrats (or, in Europe, various social democratic parties).

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

And so my pictures will only be an emotional catharsis. Although I knew this and was often told so by underclass blacks who had no illusions about trying to talk to the "inner goodness" in their white oppressors, 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, thereby strengthening an unjust system. I'm just as hypocritical as these art snobs because I'm playing by their rules. When my critique became too "radical," they turned their backs on me. I'm therefore forced to water it down so that it risks becoming a teary condescending "paternalistic" naïve vagabond adventure story about the 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!

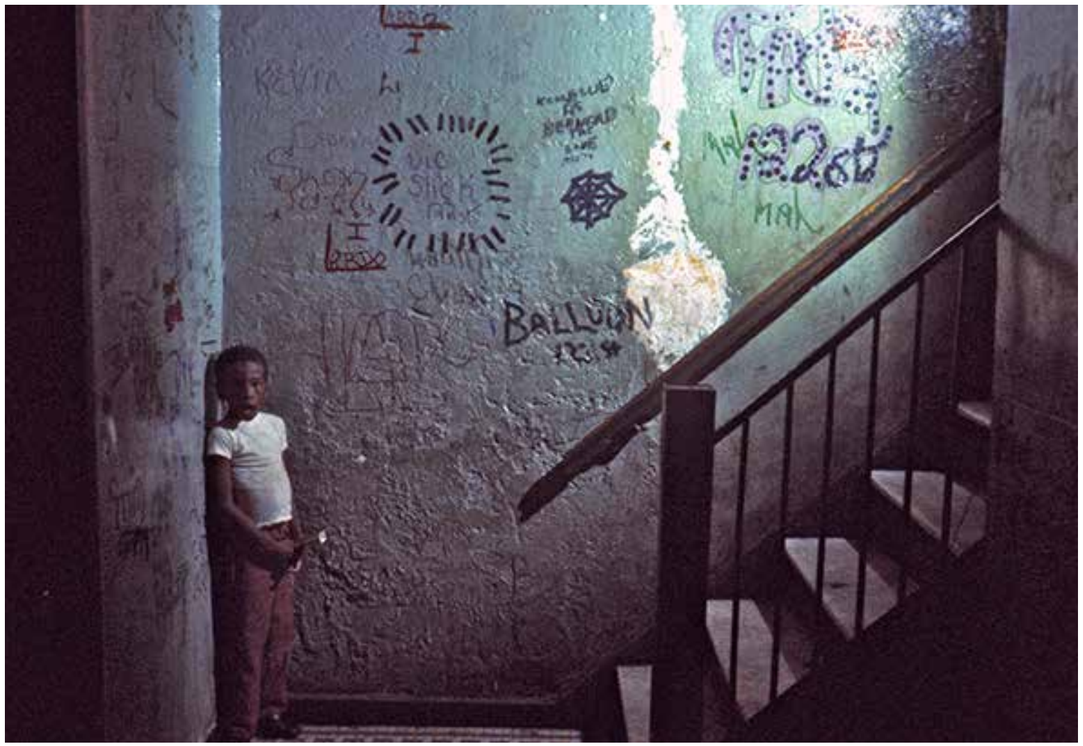
1974 - Harlem, NY

1974 - Bronx, NY

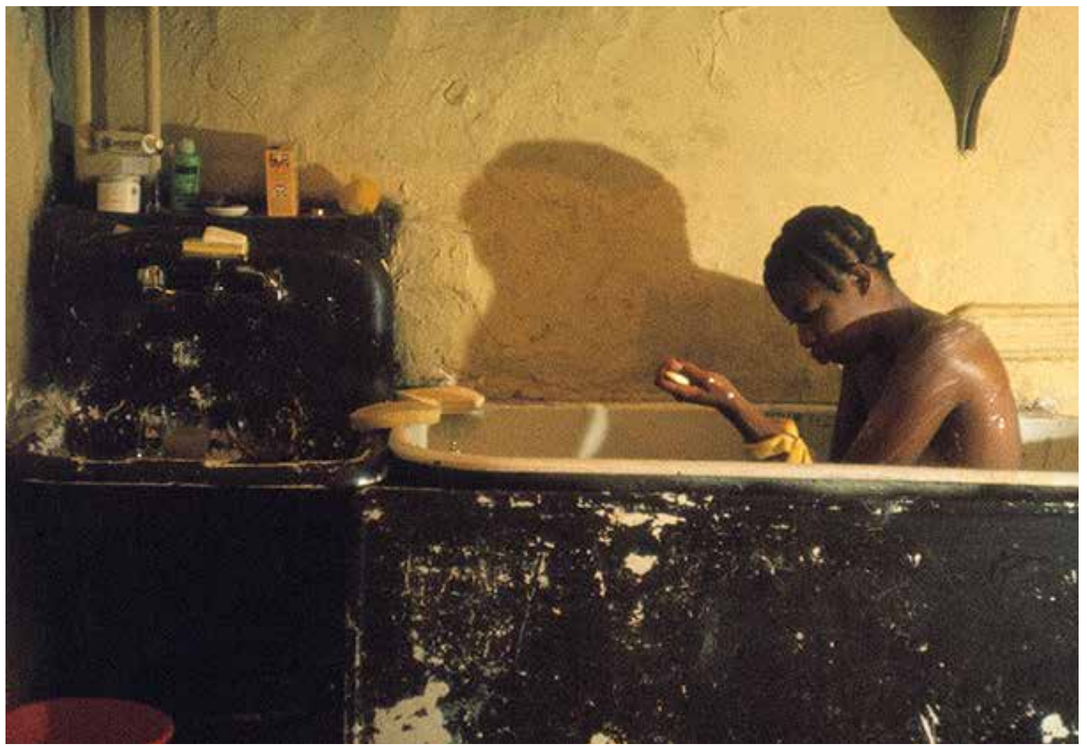
1974 - Harlem, NY

1974 - NYC

Note: Sort baggrund her



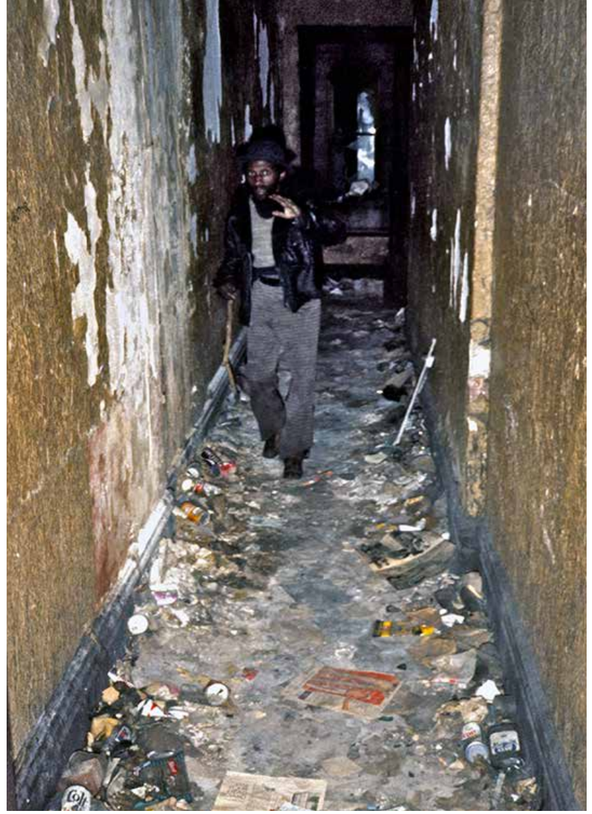
1974 - Harlem, NY



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 the Harlem of the 1970s, everything is black except for the stores, which are owned by white or Arab immigrants (in the past they were owned by Jews). The only stores that aren't owned by these outsiders, the street people will tell you, are the omnipresent funeral homes since white undertakers will have nothing to do with black bodies. Being an undertaker is one of the surest ways of reaching middle class status. For death is as ubiquitous in Harlem as the fear haunting everyone beneath sporadic uneasy laughter. Yet I feel safer as a member of the ever-present invisible "Whitey" in Harlem than most blacks do, for as always, aggression is aimed at fellow victims rather than at the hated 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 all too well that if they choose the door on the right, they'll either become re-habilitated, which means a return to the previous condition in which they couldn't survive without using drugs, or they become "up-habilitated" by learning how to live in the ghetto jungle through deadened sensitivity or some other form of mind-crippling. They subjugate themselves to The Man's blame-the-victim brand of slavery, which changes the victims rather than their oppressive environment.

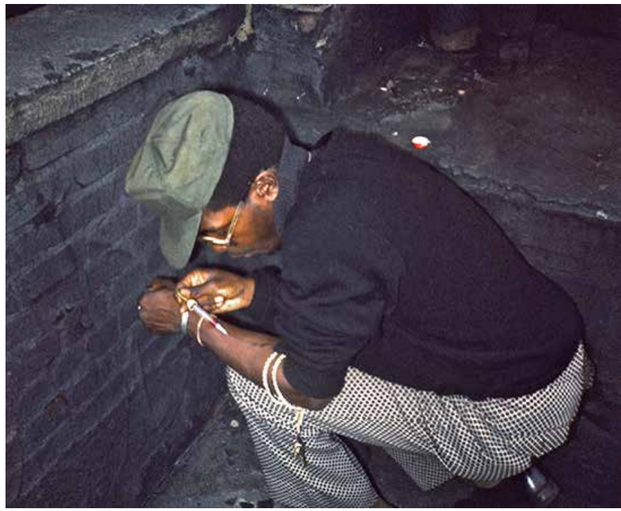
This woman is a living illustration of the typical choices in Harlem. An attacker broke into her apartment and tried to kill her with a knife. She survived by jumping out a window on the third floor—and was crippled for life.

1995 - NYC

1992 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY



1974 - NYC

In the Shadows of the American Way of Life

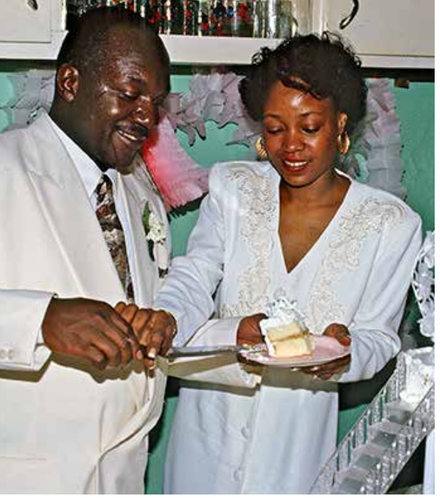
"If white people haven't killed you yet, you can do what you want. You didn't have to reach a hundred years to get to that place. In a world this low, dumb, and cruel, every day white people ain't killed you yet is a win."
Colson Whitehead in Crook Manifesto about Harlem in the 1970's

The Americans I have the strongest feelings for are the addicts, who've been too sensitive and human to survive the brutal American drive for success. They're not only victims of that violence but are capable of hitting back with all the viciousness injected into them by the "American way of life." Many times, while on the rooftops of New York, I helped these bound souls tie off. Every day, on certain street corners in Harlem, you see thousands of addicts waiting for heroin. At night not even the police brave these neighborhoods, from whose "shooting galleries" we sometimes enjoyed an incredible view of the Empire State Building's "big needle."

The shooting galleries are condemned buildings taken over by junkies who are "shooting up" and "shooting down" anyone suspected of being a cop or a "bustman" (slang for an undercover cop). Since the penalty for being an addict and a criminal, which is what it leads to—in other words, for being a victim—is the same for being a murderer, they have no real choice. They get a mandatory life sentence whether they act as victims or executioners. The shooting galleries are therefore extremely dangerous.

This man, who'd been a heroin addict for 16 years, suffered from malnutrition and had running sores all over his body. He was unable to find any better spot to shoot up and had to take the foul-smelling bandage off his leg to find a vein. He suffered terribly and knew all too well he had less than two years to live. He had nothing to lose and urged me to publicize these pictures to scare young people away from drugs.

1973 - Harlem, NY

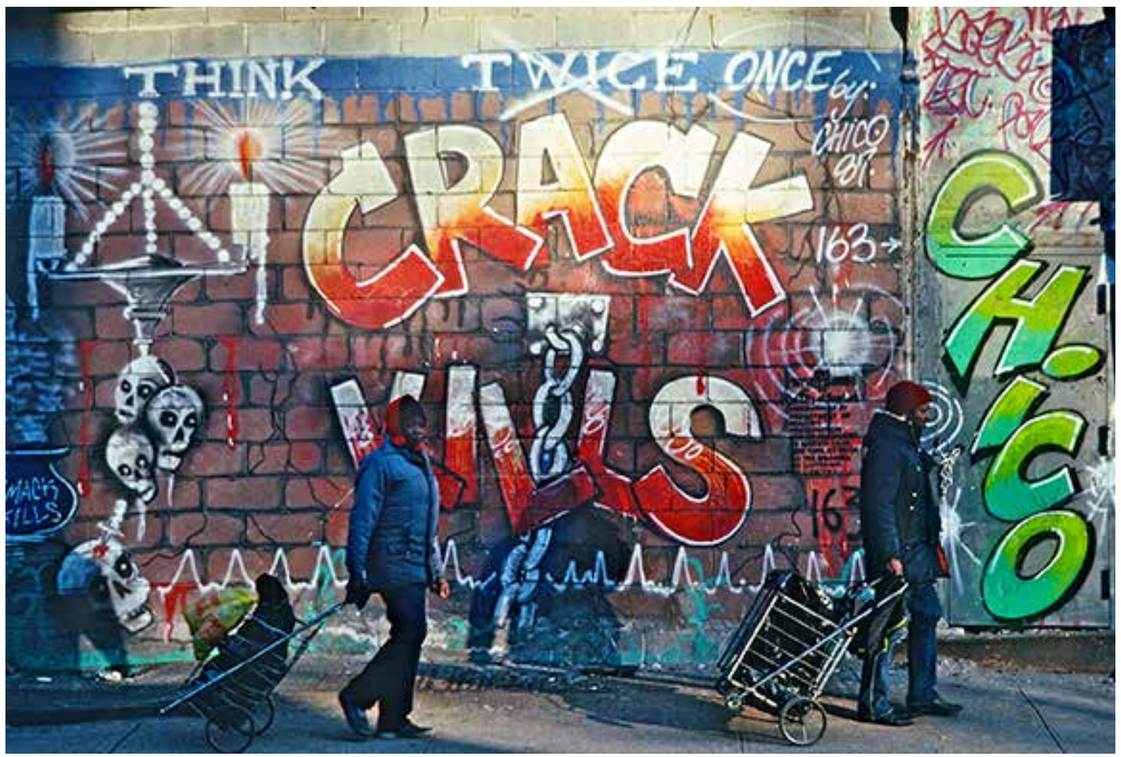


1985 - Harlem, NY

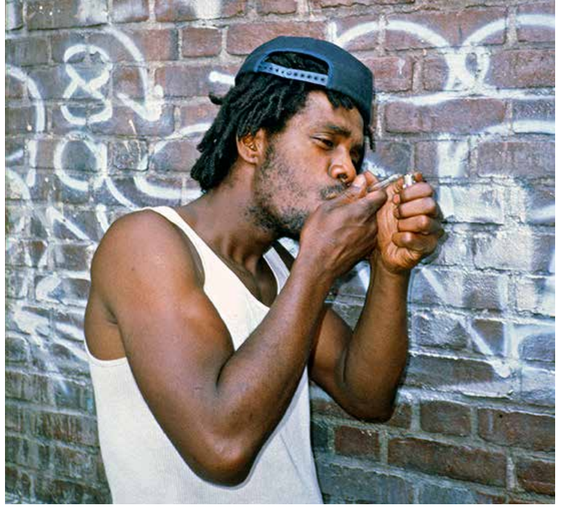
Losing Friends to Crack

I thought I'd seen the worst in the '70s, when I'd gradually learned to knock the guns out of the hands of slow heroin addicts. So I was totally unprepared for the devastation of the crack epidemic in the '90s, when victims were wildly shooting guns during their paranoid few minutes of high and constantly broke into my van or robbed their own families to support their habit.

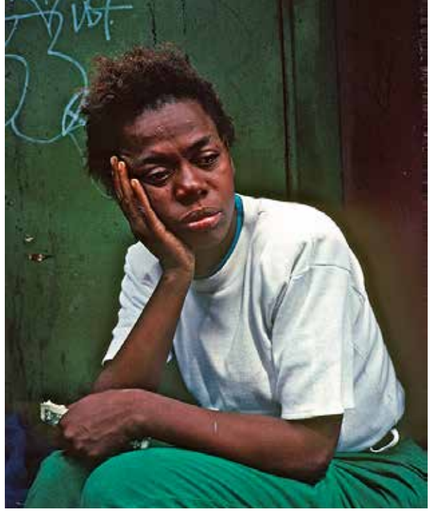
Many of my best friends succumbed to crack. I'd known Robert Yard for years, and shortly after his wedding in Harlem, his wife fell victim to crack. I saw him desperately try to save her and their marriage while her life spiraled into an abyss of crime, prostitution, and prisons. I lost many other Harlem friends after 2000, when white gentrification forced them out.



1991 - NYC

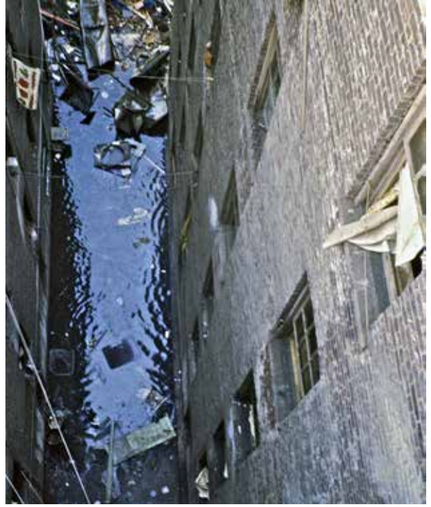


1992 - NYC



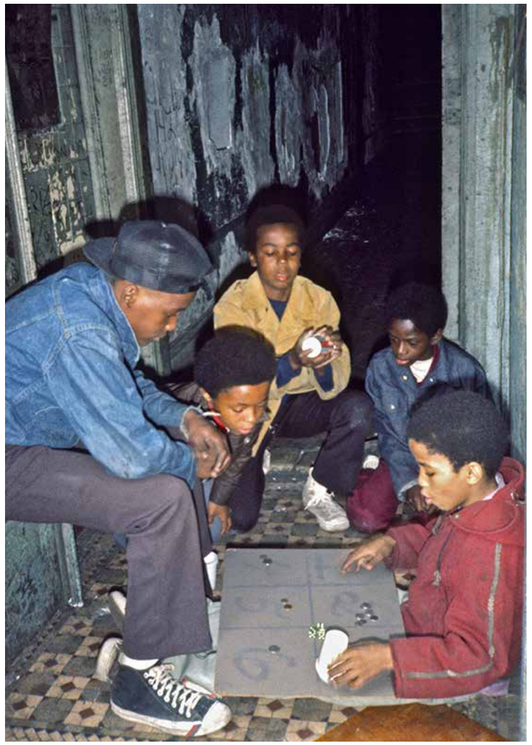
1991 - NYC

1991 - NYC



1974 - Harlem, NY

1989 - Harlem, NY

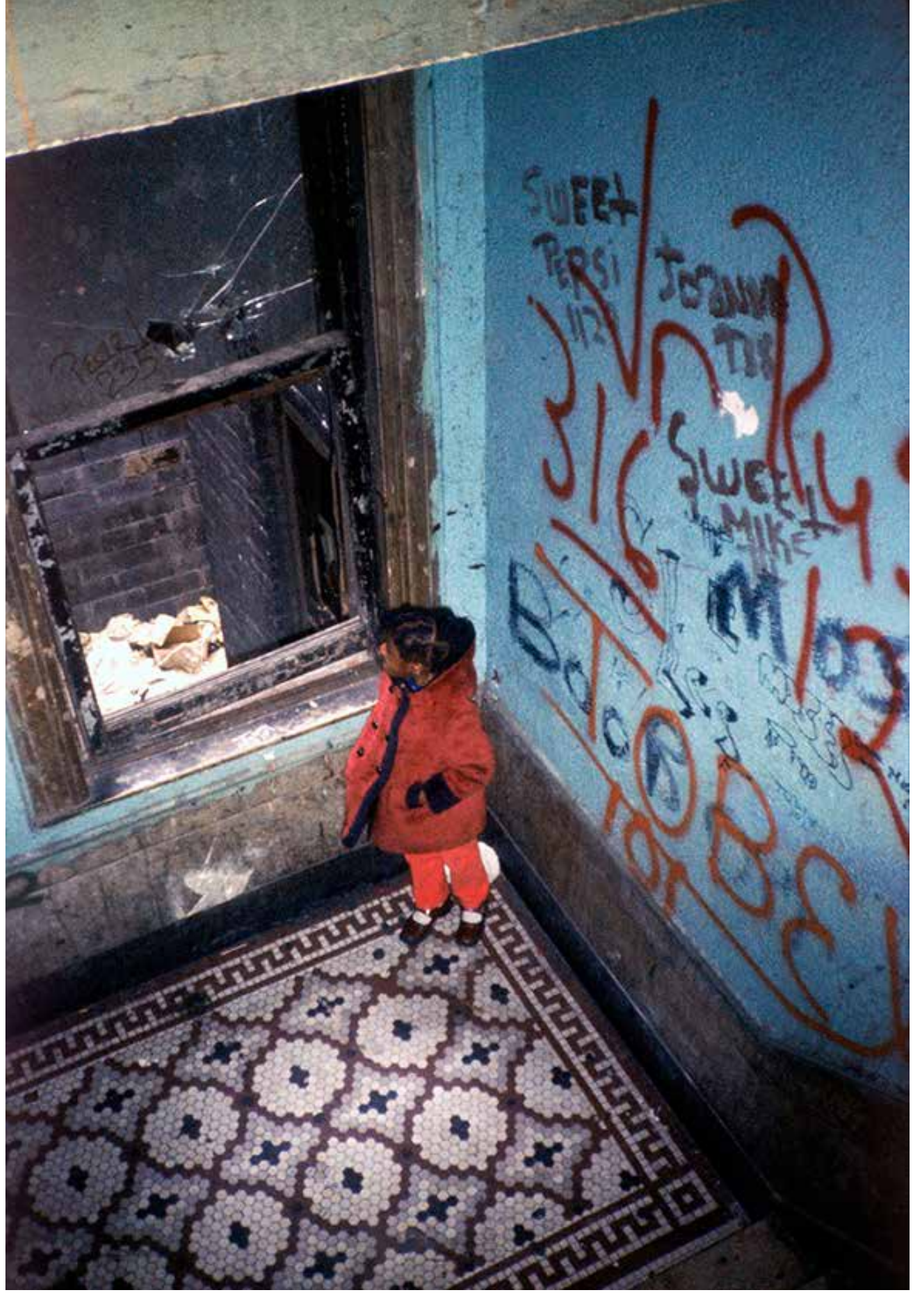


Both from 1974 - Harlem, NY

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?

1972 - Harlem, NY

But it's not just the adults who suffer in Harlem. The most indescribable and distressing suffering I've witnessed befalls children. It can cripple their minds—their entire being—for life. And it's not only those children who are forced to beg like dogs to survive or the children trying to get a penny by polishing windows for white drivers at the stoplights. Even more, it's the children we murder with our negative thinking about them, the crushing thinking they've internalized to such an extent that they're convinced they have no future. What impression does it make on children when they see their sisters and brothers shot and killed in the street? 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 a constant threat.

The students 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 have 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?

1973 - Harlem, NY

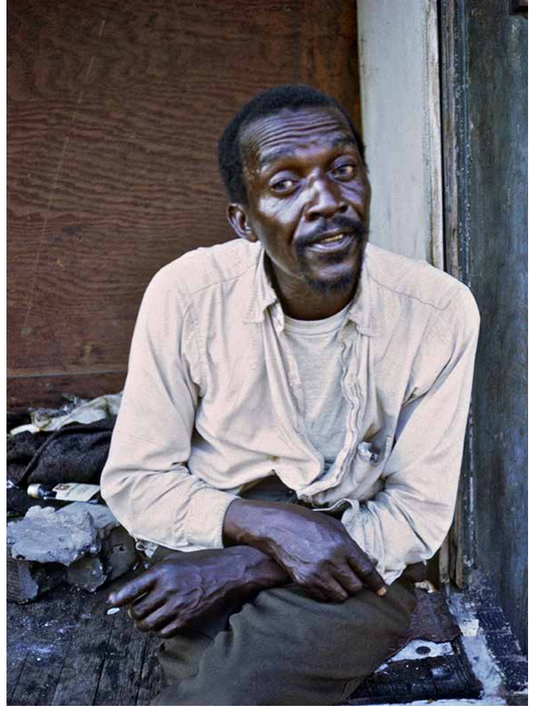
Give a damn III and this section as it is presented in my slideshow

Note: Sort baggrund her

1974 - Washington, DC

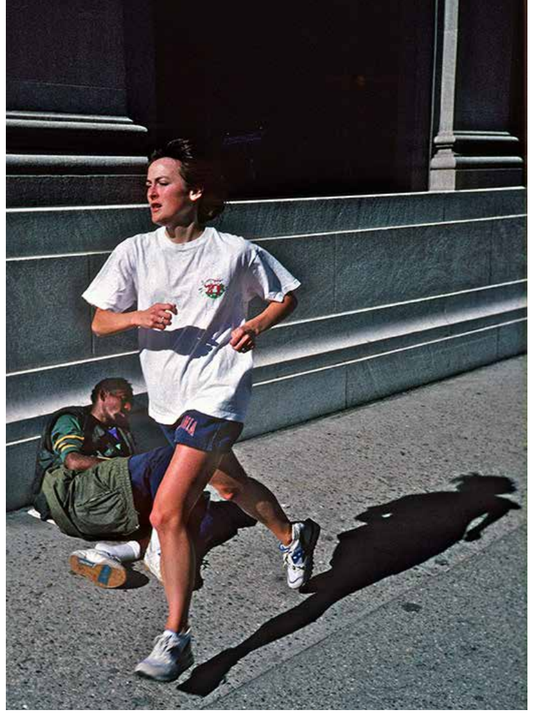
1974 - Bronx, NY

1974 - Bronx, NY

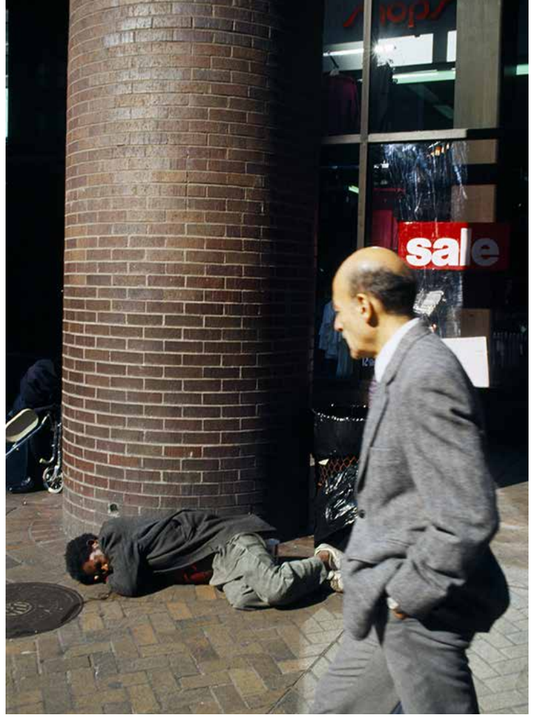


1974 - Baltimore, MD

1974 - Washington, NC



1992 - NYC



1995 - NYC

The White Gaze: Seeing Harlem Through a Lens of Despair

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

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

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

This type of "give a damn about your fellow man" journey through Harlem illustrates, in all its saccharine sentimentality, the white liberal way of seeing the ghetto. From the paternal almost loving care of the Southern plantation aristocracy, there's a direct link to the endless talk about helping one's fellow man among Northern liberals. Many liberals do great and exhausting work in the ghettos, but whether we breastfeed 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 consider blacks or browns inherently inferior as do conservatives. Instead, we see them as functionally inferior as a result of the injustice, slavery, and discrimination of a distant past. After having experienced this book, they'll ask in despair: "What can we do?" But we don't have the courage, or are paralyzed by the fear of looking into the soul to get in touch with our abyss of pain—the pain that makes us such powerless but effective oppressors.

Thus, we liberals, in fact, are one of the most important tools of continued oppression. We help the 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 in the ghetto has no time left for the condescending attitude of the liberals and is constantly trying to provoke our true racist/Islamophobic face. They refuse to see as progress the knife in their back pulled from four inches to two inches. 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 exact opposite of the upper caste, with its need to see a victim. For Blacks would lose their sanity if they only saw 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 incredible fact that, despite this criminal environment, 90% of the youth have never been in conflict with the law.

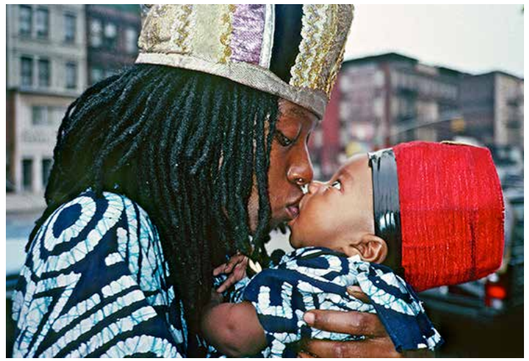
They'll look at the culture thriving amid the oppression and be heartened by the fact that most of Harlem's population are surviving. They'll see the many roses that manage to grow up in this jungle.

1974 - Harlem, NY

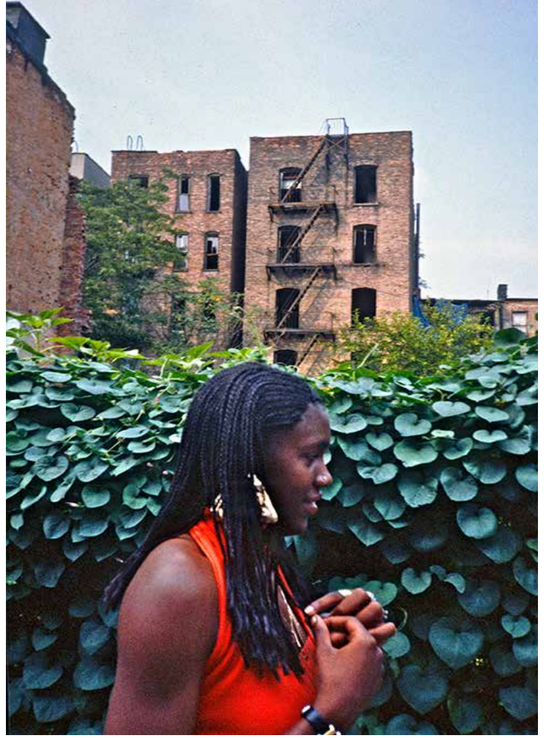
1974 - NYC

1989 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY



1992 - Harlem, NY



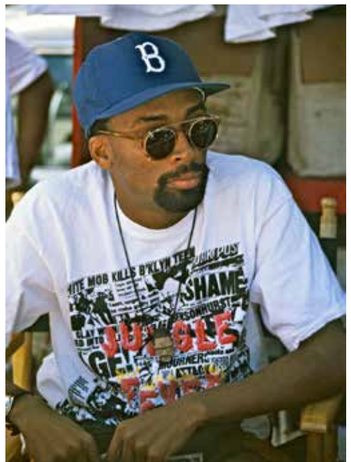
1995 - Harlem, NY

1994 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY - Right 1995 - Spike Lee

Blossoming Amid Concrete: The Harlem Rose

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

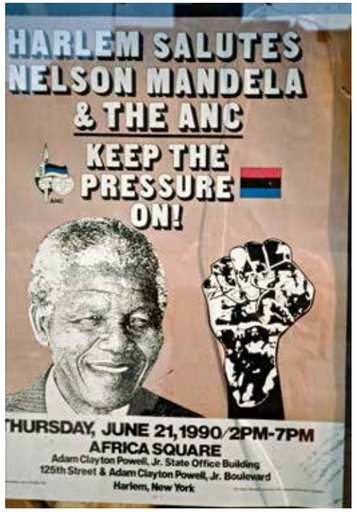


There is a rose in Spanish Harlem,
a rose in black and Spanish Harlem.
It is a special one,
it never sees the sun
it only comes out
when the moon is on the run
and all the stars are gleaming.
It's growing in the street
right up through the concrete
soft, sweet and dreaming.
With eyes as black as coal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

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

1973 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Harlem, NY



1990 - Harlem, NY

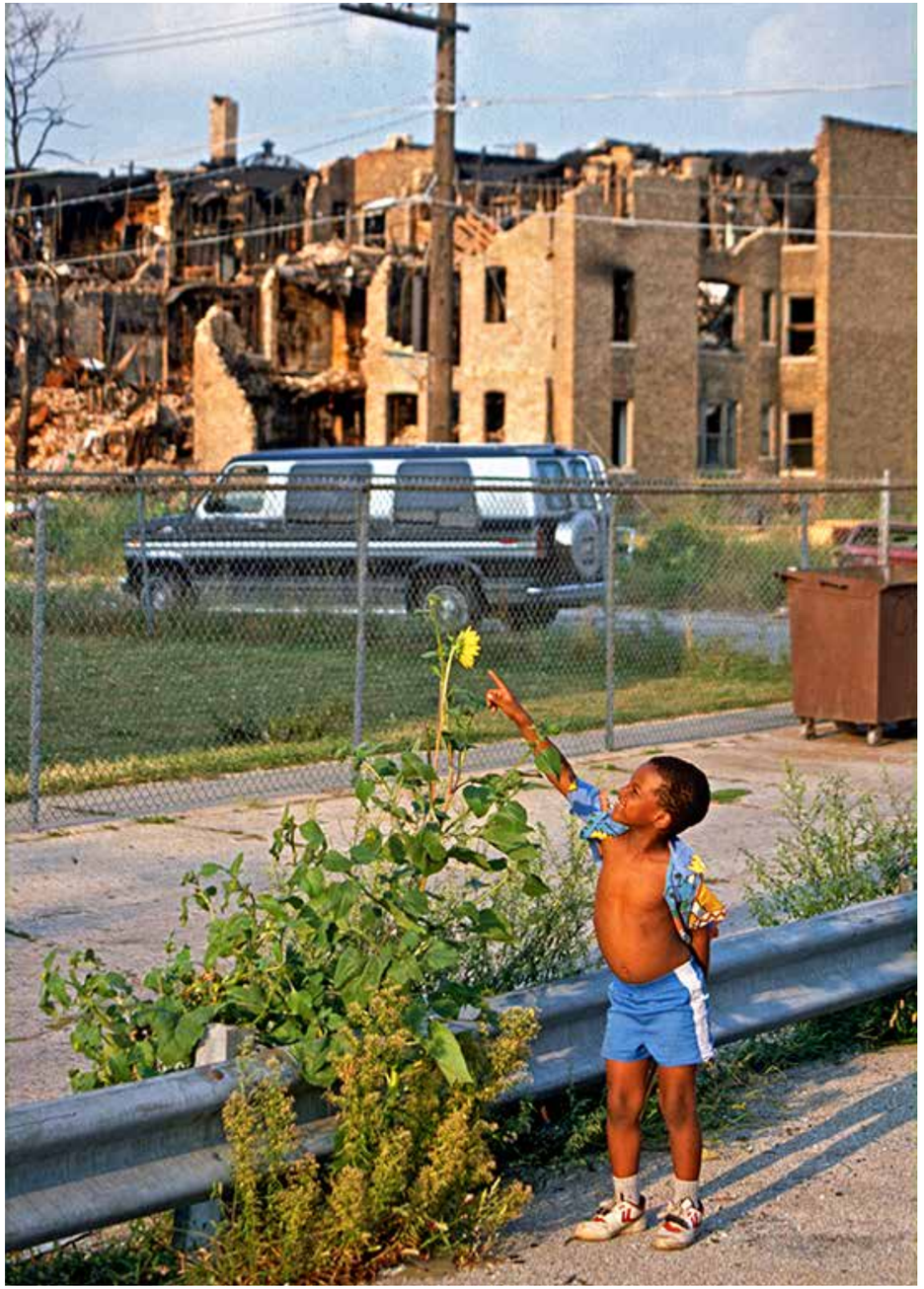
1974 - Spanish Harlem, NY

1974 - NYC

1974 - NYC

1974 - NYC

1990 - Harlem, NY



1995 - Chicago

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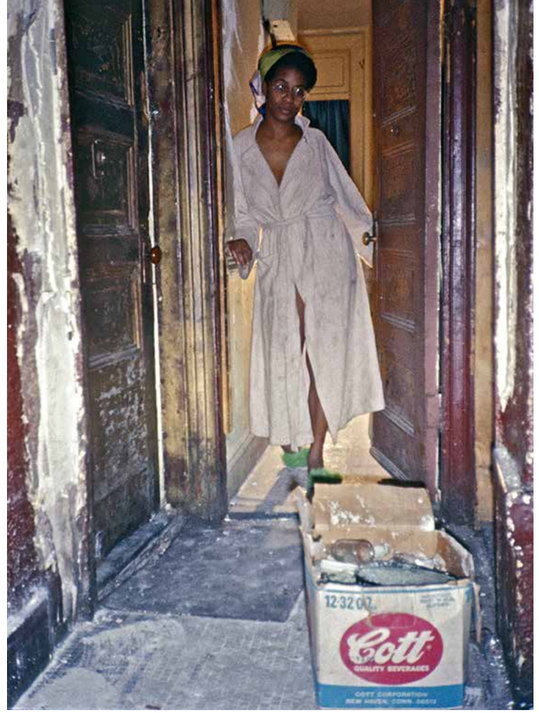
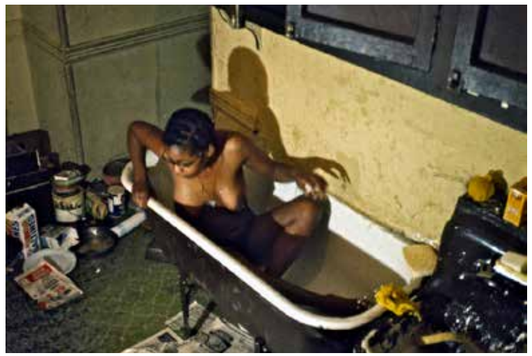




All three Merrilyn 1972 - NYC

1974 - Bronx, NY

1974 - Bronx, NY

We Love to Say It With Roses, but 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 first met her, she was a heroin addict shooting up a couple of times a week. Her situation in the little apartment was desperate, and I admired her for being able to get out of it—I myself sank deeper and deeper into despair while I lived with her. Never in my life have I lived in such oppressive and soul-annihilating conditions. I was able neither to think nor write in the apartment. It's wasn't only the constant break-ins; it was the fear of them, the fear of what might happen next time as well as the fear of walking into the hallway or the street, where you could be attacked with a knife or gun. Narrowness you can become accustomed to. You can get used to a dinner table that doubles as a bathtub (and must be used in the kitchen). You can get used to having a wire fence between the kitchen and the bedroom so that the rats won't get in and bite your face while you sleep. And it soon becomes a morning habit to brush the dead cockroaches, on which you've slept all night, out of the bed. Even the shootings and police sirens on America's violent TV shows knocking through the walls can be a pleasant relief from similar sounds coming from the street.
But the persistent fear of that moment when you yourself might get stabbed in the stomach—that you can never get used to. I was attacked in this 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. Not only did she survive, but she was even able to wrench herself out of the ghetto and become an actress in San Francisco. Since then she's often come and introduced my slideshow to the audience. Yes, she was a rose who managed to spring up through the asphalt.

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

The Invisible Walls of Ghettoization and Oppression

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

All over the world we oppressors love to use such encouraging exceptions to further oppress our victims with.
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.

Bad as it was, Harlem was far from the worst ghetto in 1970s New York. In the South Bronx, where European film crews often shot their footage on the wartime destruction of Germany, there were districts where nine out of ten people died an unnatural death—murder, hunger, overdose, rat bites, etc. In the Brownsville ghetto, I saw two murders and heard of four others the same day.

Most oppressors have difficulty understanding how we build ghettos. There are, for instance, no walls around a ghetto, and it's not necessarily a result of bad housing. It's not only the underclass we ghettoize.

That the ghetto is not anything concrete, like the broken bottles and litter, I saw in Detroit, where housing was far better than in Harlem. Here I was fortunate enough to get to live on both sides of the dividing line between the ghetto and the white areas – all the way out there where every white house is up for sale.

1974 - Saratoga, NY

White Flight: How We Continually Build and Expand Ghettos

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

I can understand many things about white racism, but to this day it's an absolute mystery to me why these whites are moving away from everything they've built up and come to love just because a black family moves into the neighborhood. These better-off blacks live up to the stodgy white middleclass demands in every single respect—a well-cut lawn, a hedge, rhododendrons. And this is what the neighborhood would continue to look like if whites didn't flee. At the same time, these blacks have a culture far more American than that of the European and Asian immigrants whom we immediately accept into our so-called melting pot. When I lived on the white side of the embarrassing ghetto fence of For Sale signs, the departing homeowners usually couldn't come up with any arguments for moving other than the completely unacceptable "declining property values," which only happens through "blockbusting" because whites all sell out at once. Thus, I experienced it as one great white American conspiracy to prevent blacks from gaining access to the melting pot, masterminded through various forms of illegal redlining by 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 higher as the NY Times has since proven—compared to the tree-covered de facto white neighborhoods. Every time I left, I felt I'd betrayed the black underclass. For when, with our white privilege, we flee to what become attractive neighborhoods, house values and assets rise, and we can borrow against our equity to send our children to expensive universities to get further ahead. But this is stolen wealth since we collapse black home values in the areas we turn into ghettos, preventing blacks from taking out loans secured by their reduced assets, thus making them poorer and poorer.

Through this aversive racism, every white in the '70s had made themselves six times richer than every black. Money multiplies, and by year 2000 we whites had become eight times richer. After the tax cuts of the Bush years, 12 times as rich as each black. And today, after the financial crisis—caused by our racist policy of giving loans to struggling blacks who were not likely to be able to repay them and often what little they had—we've made ourselves up to 20 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 forever shut out of society's mainstream—seeing someone remove the ladder leading to the "American Dream" at the very moment you're closer to it than ever—naturally triggers resentment. Sometimes violent. Our stab in their hearts will change a few of these otherwise well-behaved youths into mischief-makers, churning up hate for the remaining whites on the ghetto fringe, who then blame the victim and move.

I'm not dealing much in this book with the problems of the middleclass, but I couldn't help seeing a direct link between the violence we commit against the dignity and self-worth of these people on the frontiers of the ghetto and the violence I experienced in the inner ghettos, between our white all-American stab in the heart of the black middleclass and the frightening backstabbing in the underclass.

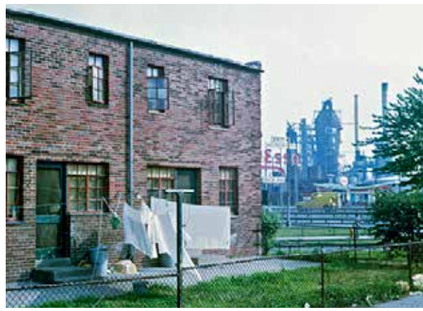
I saw the explosion of black crime in the '70s as a result of the irrational anger caused by our white betrayal and therefore didn't understand why crime declined in the '90s. Only later did I understand how this crime wave was also caused by white flight allied with local governments that deliberately destroyed thriving black neighborhoods by building highways through them, which, despite the official end of segregation, further isolated them. When the big oil companies put lead into gas in the 1940s, studies show it started to affect children's brain development, causing increased aggression and reduced impulse control when they became teenagers. This disproportionately affected the black children whom we'd forced into unattractive inner-city areas right next to highways and refineries as seen here in Philadelphia and the Fourth Ward in Houston, where George Floyd grew up. Moreover, the houses whites left to them were full of poisonous lead. I often saw children looking incredibly dumb (brain damaged) or sitting gnawing on lead pipes. And certainly I saw that generation act out through unbelievable "dumb" violent crime. In the '70s the United States began to phase out leaded gasoline, and newborns were steadily exposed to less lead—the reason crime started falling dramatically 20 years later.

Thus, I came to understand that the ghetto is a white, socially enforced continuation of chattel slavery's violent milieu. When this internalization of white psychic violence is reinforced by, for example, unemployment, which is especially severe in Detroit, it explodes in violence. Just as the number of black divorces fluctuates with unemployment, so do murder and violence against family members.

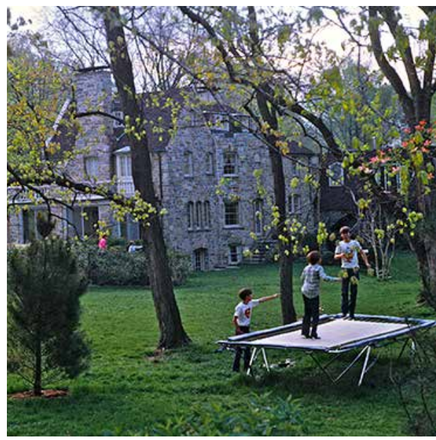
Almost every time I came back to Detroit, more of my black friends had been killed. This letter to my parents, written during my first months in America, shows how I immediately sensed the Golgotha-stab of white racism behind the bleeding of a people on the cross.

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

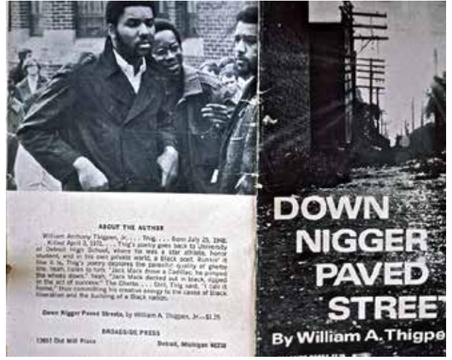
St. John 20, 24-25

"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 off in Chicago to visit Denia, the young black writer I lived with at Christmas. Even there the horrors began. You remember the two girlfriends of hers that she and I 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 the murderers. She was found by her fiancé, shot and cut up with knives. She was the second person I have known in America who has been murdered. Denia has now bought a gun and has begun target-practicing. That night in Chicago I also experienced my first big shootout, probably between police and criminals. We were on a visit on Mohawk Street when it suddenly broke out down below in the darkness. I tried to look out, but Denia pulled me away from the window.

Well, compared with the things that have happened here in Detroit, I've almost forgotten all that. First, I lived with a well-off auto-worker's family in one of the respectable black neighborhoods at the seven-mile limit, way out there where the white areas begin. Their son in college, Dwight Vann, had picked me up and invited me home—the third black home I have lived in. Beautiful people (note: Dwight was killed the following year).
Easter morning they took me to church. But then I moved into the ghetto itself with three students, and since then it has been a nightmare. One of the first days I was here, Thigpen, whom I had just been introduced to, was murdered. He was a fantastic person, big as a bear, and a poet (I am sending you his collection, DOWN NIGGER PAVED STREETS). Apparently, for no other reason than having written a harmless poem about the narcotics trade in the city, he was executed by narcotics gangsters, along with two of his friends, and found the other day. They were tied up and laid on the floor and shot in the back of the head. But what shocked me most was the reaction of the three people I'm living with. One of them, Jeff, had known Thigpen for years and is photographed with him in a book. But Jeff just came in calmly with the newspaper one morning saying, "Hey, you remember this dude, Thigpen, you met the other day? Look, they blew him away too." It made no greater impression. This is how they react to all of the violence, which really is getting to me. Still, they are afraid themselves. I'm not the only one who's trembling from fear here.

The nights are the worst. I'm beginning to get really down from the lack of sleep. Jeff and the two others sleep upstairs, while I stay down in the living room. Every night they shove the refrigerator in front of the door and put some empty bottles on top, so that any attempt to open the door will make the bottles fall and wake them up. One night the cat leaped up on the refrigerator and knocked over the bottles with a crash, so I shot upstairs to the others. I am a nervous wreck by now and constantly lie listening for footsteps outside (nobody but a robber dares to go on foot at night in Detroit as far as I can tell). Once in a while I hear shots outside. I have never really trembled before, but now I sometimes get the same jelly-like sensation as that night I was mugged in San Francisco. My heartbeat alone is enough to keep me awake.



1971 - Detroit

In fact, I really didn't think I had closed my eyes once the entire week, until I suddenly woke up from a terrible nightmare.
I almost never dream now when I am traveling, but that night I dreamed about a sunny day when I was eleven, lying on the living room floor at home in the parsonage. I was lying there eating oranges, I remember, when the radio news announced the murder of Lumumba. I didn't understand anything then, yet I remember it vividly. I now saw this scene clearly in the nightmare, but it kept changing to another scene somewhere in Africa, where I was lying on the ground while some Africans fired one machine-gun burst after another at me. I shouted to them to stop, but the bullets just kept on drilling into me, a terrible sensation. I woke up to this real Detroit nightmare, which I now suddenly found quite peaceful in comparison, and a bit later I managed to get a couple of hours of sleep.
But the nightmares are not always over when day breaks. One of the first days I was there, I ventured out in the streets on foot. Scarcely half an hour had gone by before a police car with two white cops stopped short and they called me over to the car. I was almost happy to see white faces again and walked over. They asked to see my ID. You are constantly being stopped like this when you walk around in the ghetto. I often ask myself what difference there really is between being in the ghetto here and being a black in South Africa, when you must con-

1996 - Detroit

stantly show your identity papers to white policemen. So almost automatically I stuck my hand down into my shoulder bag to get out my passport. Immediately the cops' pistols jumped out right into my face: "Hold it!" It is a terrible experience to be looking into the muzzle of a gun, and I began trembling from fear. But nothing happened, they were just afraid that I had a pistol in my bag. It felt like a miracle that their guns had not gone 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 self-confidence and answered audaciously, "I live here!" The longer I live here, the more I look at the whites with the eyes of the blacks, and I can't help but harbor an ever-increasing hatred for them. It is a strange sensation to live in a city like Detroit where you never see anything but black faces around you. Little by little you undergo a slow change. The black faces 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 certainly have no desire to go out into the cold icy wastes out there where the ghetto stops. So you can probably understand the shock I get each time I turn on the TV and suddenly see nothing but white faces. Yes, in a strange way the white faces become a substantial part of the Detroit nightmare. For it is not only the crime which keeps me awake at night. It's just as much the television and the radio. Everywhere in the ghettos of Detroit and Chicago it's a habit among the blacks to leave the television and the radio on throughout the night to make robbers think you are still awake. Another thing is that they have gradually become so accustomed to sleeping with the TV and radio on that it has become a kind of narcotic; many of them simply cannot fall asleep without this noise.
I discovered this one day when Denia and I wanted to take a nap in Chicago and she automatically turned on the TV so as to fall asleep. It is shocking how early some people become addicted to this noise-narcotic.
When I lived with Orline, this beautiful young black mother in Jackson, fifty miles outside Detroit, I discovered that it was almost impossible for us to live together.
When we went to bed, she always turned on the radio. I then lay there waiting for her to fall asleep, after which I slowly tried to turn down the volume since otherwise it was absolutely impossible for me to fall asleep. But every time I got the volume down to a certain level, it made her two children, two and three years old, wake up and start crying, so I immediately had to turn the volume again. I could only take it for two nights, after which I had to move. 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 equally dependent on this noise. You quite simply 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 message, "Leave the driving to us." It all feels like one big white conspiracy against the blacks. Just as they bombed the South Vietnamese population into "strategic villages" in order to brainwash it, so it almost seems as if in the USA they have forced the blacks away from the small villages into these big psychic concentration camps where they can better control them with the mass media. It is incredible how, as a result of this oppression, they conform almost to the letter to every view 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 rather, you are prevented from thinking. Doesn't all this music and noise stifle a person's capacity for independent and intellectual development? Is it strange that many of these people seem like zombies, as they themselves jokingly say?

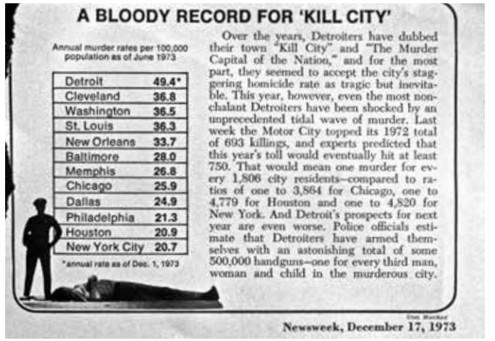
The three I live with are some of the few politically active people in Detroit. Jeff has given me some books about Cuba that he wants me to read. But it is impossible for me to read in these surroundings, with all the noise, nervousness, trembling, and fear of something, though you don't even know what that something is. Jeff is one of the increasing number of blacks who have traveled illegally to Cuba through Canada. He tells me so many fantastic things about it, and I listen, but much of it seems so irrelevant in these cruel surroundings. He says that 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 thing which disappointed him was that the Cuban blacks don't yet have Afro hairstyles.

Jeff was so happy in Cuba that he tried everything possible to avoid being sent back to the U.S., but he was not allowed to stay. Now, after the trip, he has had problems with the FBI, who twice visited his parents. His student aid was suddenly cut off and he was expelled from college. He has therefore become a taxi driver, and goes around in his own dream world reading books about Cuba in the taxi. He told me laughing one day that he "held himself up" a few weeks ago. Since taxi drivers are always being mugged he "stole" $50 from himself, called the police, and said the robber was black, looked so and so, and ran in that direction. Then he did not have to work anymore that day and drove out to Belle Isle to read his books on Cuba.

Unfortunately, he does not want to use his experiences to work politically here in Detroit; the system is so massive and oppressive that it's no use, he says. So now he is just working to get back to Cuba. He does, however, want to go to Washington in two days to demonstrate against the Vietnam war. One million are expected. We will drive down together. I can hardly wait to get out of this hell, and only hope it is more peaceful in Washington so I can get some rest. But I have to come back to Detroit. Just as in Chicago, I have met such warm people here that I simply cannot fathom their goodness toward me. I cannot understand how two such cruel and oppressive cities can contain such exceptional people. It has to be possible for me to learn to live with the ghetto, for I must come back to these people. But it will take me a long time to get used to the conditions. Just a trip to the corner store in the evening requires that we take the car. Jeff and the two others simply do not dare to walk one-and-a-half blocks!

I will remember Detroit as an endless gliding drive through a ghost-town to the sound of the car radio's newest black hit, "For god's sake, give more power to the people," which is being pounded into my head. And then every day the newest murder statistics. Since it's Easter week, only 26 people were murdered. They expect to reach 1,000 before Christmas! More lives

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.

Newsweek, December 17, 1973

1971 - Philadelphia, PA

are lost in one year in the civil war here than in six years in Northern Ireland. Yet in the newspapers, "five people killed in yesterday's violence in Detroit" merit 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 have 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 out in thick belts, five to ten miles wide, around downtown business districts as seen here in Houston, where the rich live in the city and the poor in slums on the outskirts. The underclass is constantly being squeezed and pushed around. "Urban renewal" (or "negro removal" as James Baldwin called it), supposedly for the underclass's benefit, is used to get rid of, concentrate, or hide our undesirables. This is particularly true in historic Harlem, from where most of my black friends today have been pushed out. It often made me cry to see how historic European-looking "slum" neighborhoods were being plowed under and stood on end, as here in Baltimore's cozy and charming ghetto.

Stacked up, you feel even more confined, and, accordingly, crime increases proportionately with the height of these vertical slums. In Philadelphia the street gangs were replaced by floor gangs who struggled floor against floor with each other—it could mean death to get off the elevator on the wrong floor. More than 100 street gang members, aged 12 to 17, were killed there every year. One of them was a local street vendor who made a living selling my book American Pictures. I had several friends who were held up at gunpoint by 10- or 11-year-old children who also shoot wildly around with Uzi submachine guns.

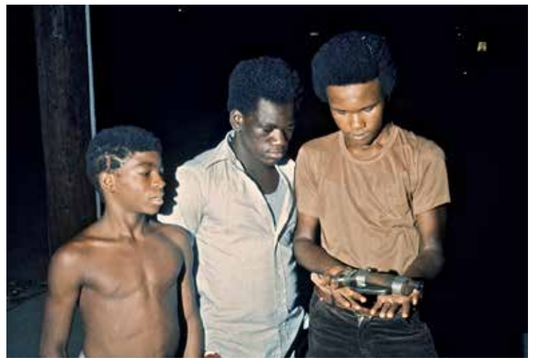
By giving them a sentence often twice their age, we whites hope to have removed a part of the ghetto. In the same futile way, we demolish the houses in the ghetto without removing the causes of the ghetto.

Though five out of six housing-code violations in slums are proven to be from the neglect of landlords, not their despairing tenants, the blame-the-poor myth that "people cause slums" persists.
Yet having lived for years in those old dilapidated apartments handed over to the poor when they are already worn out and used up, I never witnessed any tenant destruction of the type which creates a slum: leaking roofs, sagging floors and stairways, defective plumbing, sewer pipes, and wiring. But never will I forget the pain and anguish I went through with my best friends in the Fillmore ghetto, Johari and Lance, when their daughter died after falling through a rotten window their slumlord had for years refused to bring up to code. Her funeral is seen in the end of the book.

1973 - Baltimore

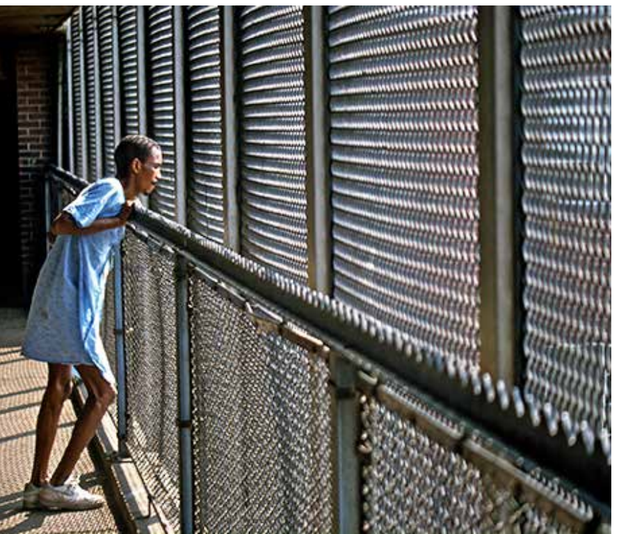
1973 - Baltimore

1974 - Philadelphia, PA



1975 - Richmond, VA

1997 - Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago



1997 - Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago

1973 - Lake Forest, IL

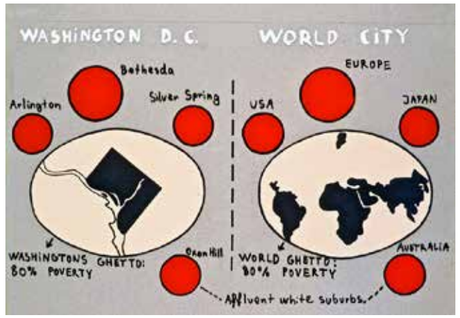
Washington as a Mirror of Our Worldwide Ghetto Problem

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

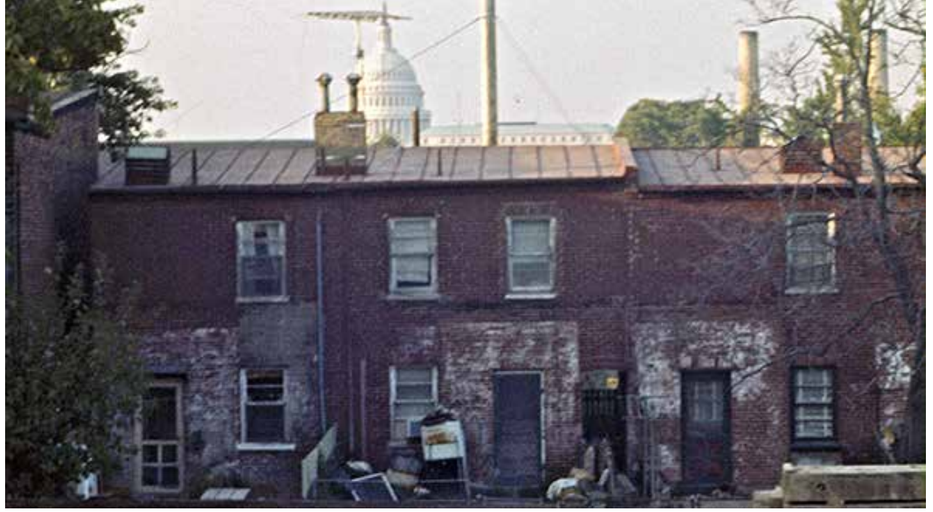
It's a paradox that we're always looking for the cause of the ghetto inside the ghetto itself even though the very concept of a "ghetto" indicates that the causes must be found outside—especially in the affluent white suburbs that surround every city. Here we have trees, swimming pools, and everything we need to thrive. We choose to live outside the city limits so our children don't have to go to school with the undesirables and to avoid paying taxes to the city even though that's the source of our income. This is how many cities become poorer and poorer. Some whites today call them "underserved communities" so as not to stigmatize the inhabitants. They forget that they are stigmatizing themselves because they themselves are perpetually underserving the ghettos they created.

Washington, D.C., reflected this dynamic during my first visit in the 1970s, when 80 percent of the city was characterized by poor neighborhoods of color and treated as a famine zone. As in the ghetto of the global city, our wealthy suburbs in Europe, the US, Japan, China and Australia own most of the businesses in the ghetto and reap huge profits but refuse to contribute "taxes" to the city. Even though the flow of capital from poor countries exceeds what we return—a result unequal trade agreements—many are convinced of our generosity and wonder at the growing anger toward the West.

During my years as a lecturer, Washington, DC, the capital of the richest country in the world, developed into a war zone with street shootouts unparalleled outside the Third World. Often, I couldn't give evening lectures because students were afraid to go home afterwards—or because all my slide equipment had been stolen from the car. The crime we fear from poor countries, especially in the form of terrorism, has long since become commonplace in DC, which had over 2,000 percent more armed robberies per year compared to similar cities in Europe. Moreover, the murder rate in Washington was 50 percent higher than that of the entire UK, as I wrote in the 1984 edition of this book. But today, as the children of Europe's outcasts are coming of age, the European picture, reflected in the murder rate in Swedish ghettos, is changing.

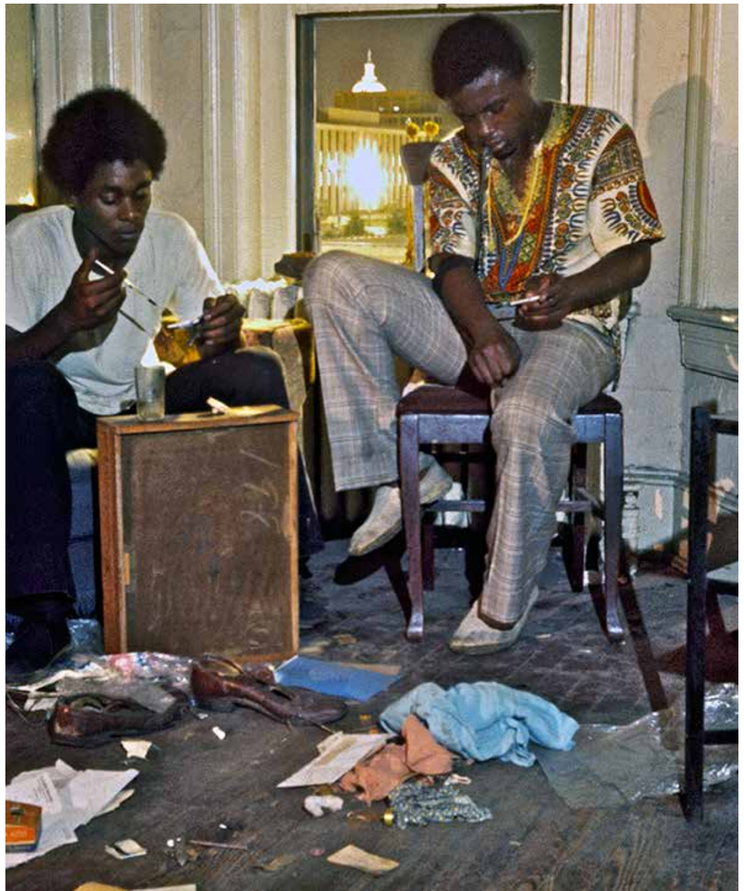


1973 - Washington DC



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 inhabitants in black areas of Washington, D.C., was a drug addict (as reported one year by The Washington Post). These two addicts, who attacked me but later invited me home, lived only three blocks from the Capitol, whose white dome can be seen in the background. Although members of Congress are afraid to walk home after work, they continue, out of paranoia, to increase funding for weapons to be used at home and abroad against those affected by our caste lottery while at the same time cutting social programs for them.

Of what use is the bulletproof vest when death comes from the heart? A month before I lived with these addicts, a cop was shot in their hallway, and a woman was murdered in this very room—the last glimpse she got of this stronghold of democracy and freedom.

1974- Elizabethtown, NC

1975 - “Thought for Food” San Francisco

1972- NYC

The Psychology of Powerlessness in Ghettos

1973 - “Smile” in Washington, DC

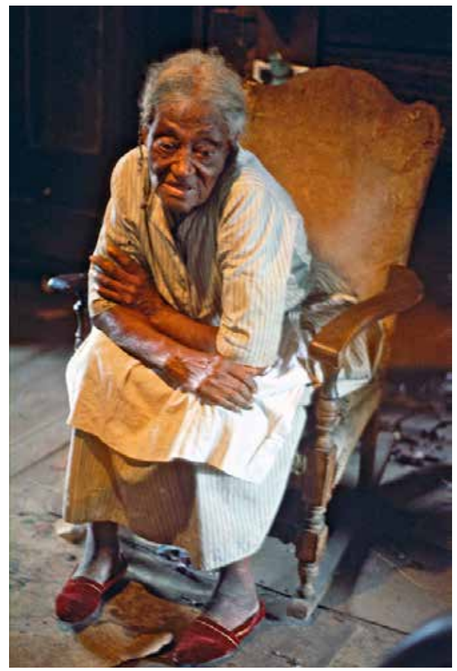
1973 - Baltimore

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

When we help trap people in a ghetto—whether economically, socially, or physically—our neglect and violence toward them at the end of their lives often turns against us. By comparing the black ghetto to another (the “gray” ghetto for older people), I understood why those we marginalize find it almost impossible to escape their situation. There are no visible walls around the gray ghetto either, but the elderly’s dependence on crumbs from the table of the rich “imprisons” them in a psychology of powerlessness similar to that of slavery. Many older people are unable to find meaningful and well-paid work, placing them in a permanent state of economic vulnerability.

The feeling of not having power over their own lives, of being dependent on a system that treats them as a burden, is part of the psychopathology of the ghetto, which in the minds of many older people creates authority figures similar to “The Man” from black psychology.
Poverty forces black and immigrant populations into the same neighborhoods where the elderly are often as discriminated against and are forgotten by our throw-away society—as are blacks in general. The elderly sometimes starve to death in their homes because they’re too afraid to venture out to buy food. I found this old woman with the “smile” sign in the window to be the closest neighbor to Congress, which in the ’70s sentenced her and thousands of others to a pension 40 percent below the official poverty line. But today (2022), even more elderly people live in “deep poverty,” that is, 50 percent below the poverty line. When you’re used to European welfare states with social and healthcare workers visiting homes to cook, clean, and shop for the elderly or infirm, you find the neglect of the elderly in the US even more inexcusable.

1974 - Greenville, NC

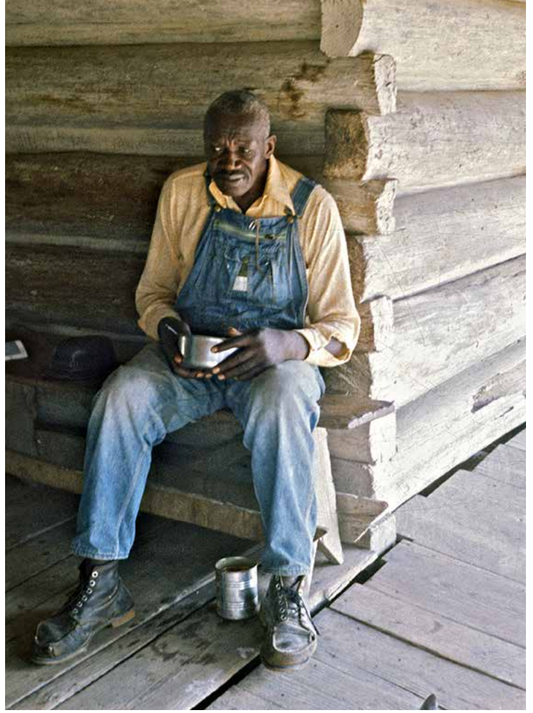


1978 - Waynesboro, GA

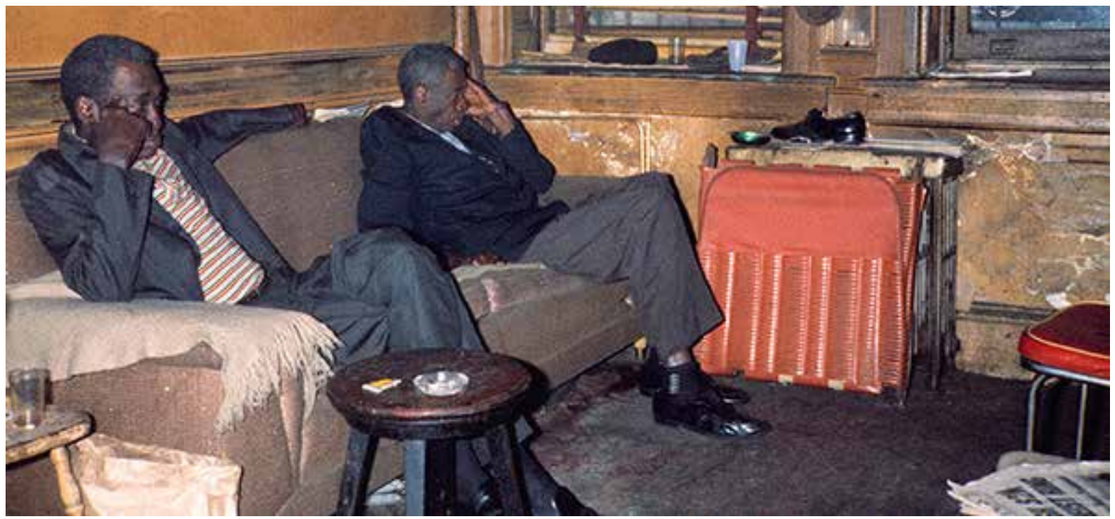
1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Norfolk, VA

1972 - NYC



1975 - Notasulga, AL



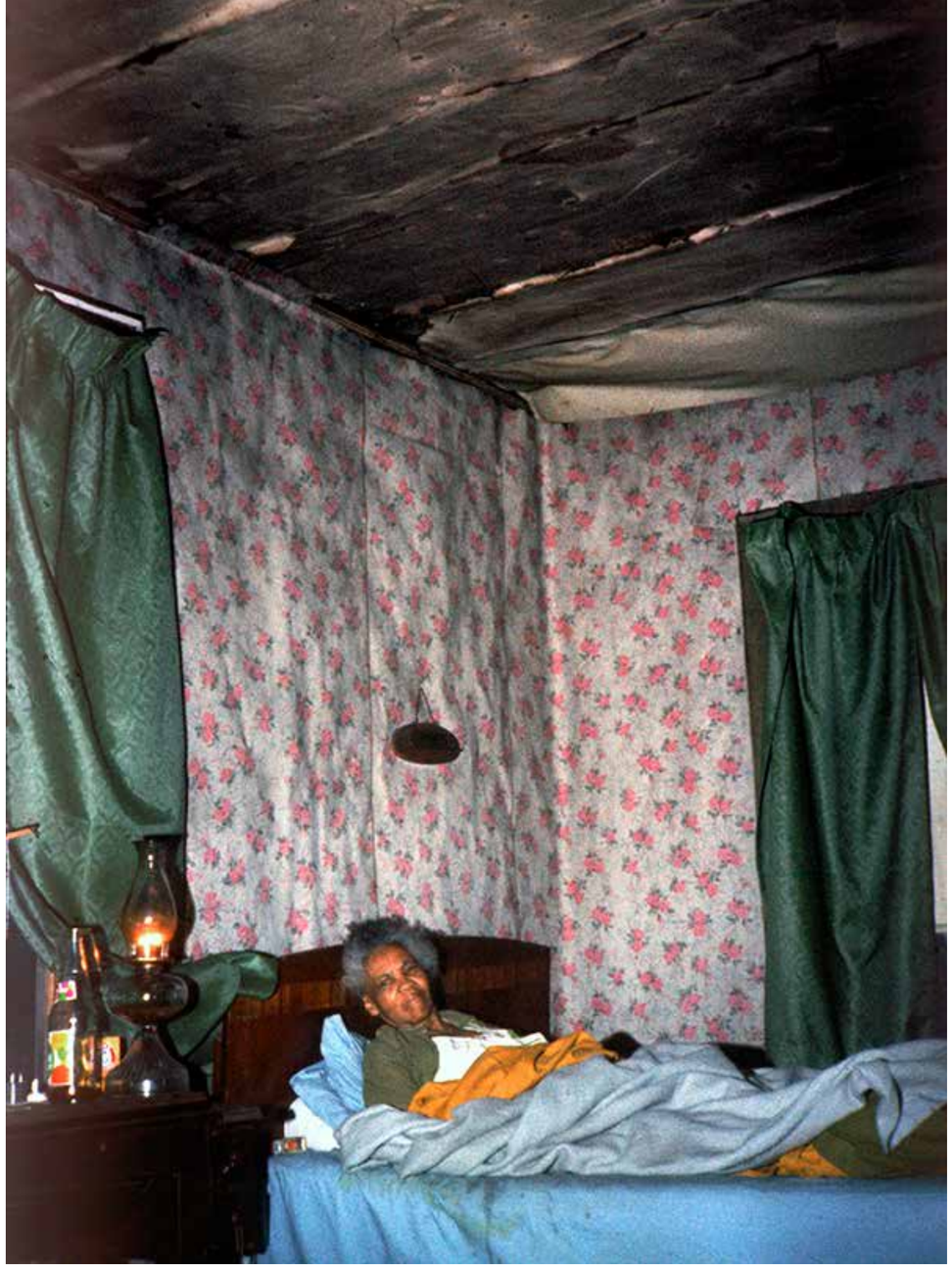
1973 - Harlem, NY

Bonds Forged in Oppression: The Black-Jewish Alliance

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

This old Jewish woman, who became one of my best friends in New York, emigrated from Russia before the revolution. Her hope was to return so she could live out her last years in "freedom from hunger and freedom from fear," as she put it in 1972. Now, she was starving, never had meat, and had often been mugged. Still, she had a deep love for the black people in the neighborhood. Remembering her own ghettoization and persecution in Russia, she, like many American Jews, was deeply committed to the struggle of blacks, and it pained her that they had to suffer as she did. A majority of whites killed during the civil rights struggle were actually Jews. Similarly, most of my lectures in the US today are organized by this minority, with their bitterly acquired insights into oppression. Their deep solidarity with other oppressed people stems from their historical need to constantly pay attention to the accumulation of pain and anger in the surrounding society, which have traditionally been manipulated by those in power and turned against the Jews. In both black American and brown Danish ghettos, this bitterness manifests itself in sporadic anti-Semitism among people who also do not feel loved and 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

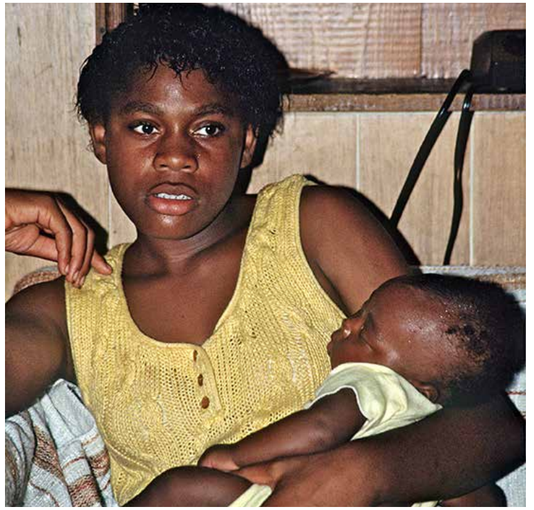
Our deliberate exclusion of mothers on welfare

1978 - Augusta, GA

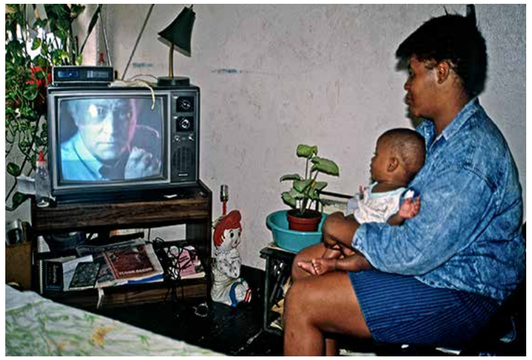
"In the context of the 'welfare queen,' the term 'project' becomes a loaded word, signifying not only a physical space but a societal project of degradation and neglect." – Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Race for Profit"

Americans are in favor of some degree of social security in old age, but they refuse to create a social safety net like the one taken for granted in European welfare states. While in theory the welfare state respects the dignity of the individual, I witnessed how the "throwaway society" deliberately tried to erode it through a network of spies who infiltrated the privacy of people receiving what Americans ironically call "welfare." Although some programs have evolved since the '80s, a systematic devaluation of the dignity of the poor continues through a distrustful system of surveillance, with takes digital control of the recipients' privacy, intensifying their humiliation. The legacy of slavery, where families were forced apart, lives on in social policies that support the idea that fathers must leave home for mothers to receive welfare.

Although reforms in the 1990s under Bill Clinton sought to "end welfare as we know it," many of the reforms only became more restrictive and pushed even more people into poverty. Millions of women, especially black women, remain trapped in this vicious cycle, where welfare is rarely enough to ensure a stable future for their neglected children, and many welfare recipients now rely on part-time jobs that pay low wages and require expensive transportation. The stereotype of "the black welfare mother" is reinforced by the current political discourses of "duty to work" and moral responsibility, which primarily target minorities. Although the majority of welfare recipients are white, stereotypes about the promiscuity and laziness of black welfare mothers persist. The cruelty towards these stigmatized mothers stems from politicians' hysterical speeches about "welfare queens" (Reagan) and "welfare cheaters" (Trump) to distract voters from how these same politicians hand out billions to billionaires for oil extraction, tax breaks, agricultural subsidies, etc.



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

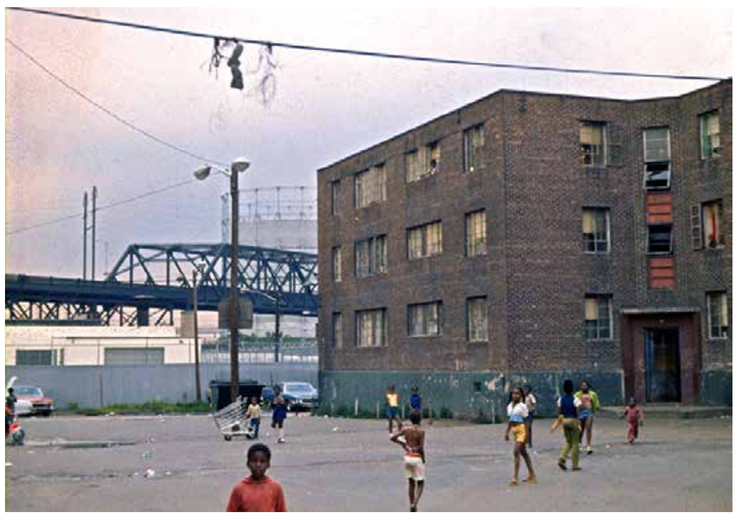
In this climate the poor must navigate a maze of degrading procedures to access the most basic resources. In many places they have to stand in line from four in the morning, often in freezing cold or rain, only to find out that there are no more cases to be processed. If they get money from secret boyfriends or otherwise try to supplement their income, they often dare not spend it on new kitchen equipment because the system's spies are constantly checking for signs of a man to take away their support. When I lived with such women, I saw every sadistic trick in the proverbial book used to dehumanize them and had to hide under the bed or in the closet when spies showed up without warning.

Many women have never known any other existence and are slowly being broken down 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 is similar to the way we treat refugees and immigrants in Denmark, where "start-up assistance" is below subsistence level.

After 1996 Congress changed the former "welfare" (AFDC) into TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), with its strict work requirements and time limits for "welfare" recipients, who now faced high housing and transportation costs, while globalization reduced opportunities for unskilled work. Poor people receive $16.5 billion annually, often only $1,800 per year per family, while agricultural subsidies have grown to over $30 billion. This has only served to make the poorest even more vulnerable and firmly trapped in poverty. When I arrived in the'70s, during America's period of greatest equality, the wealthiest 1 percent owned about 10 percent of the country'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

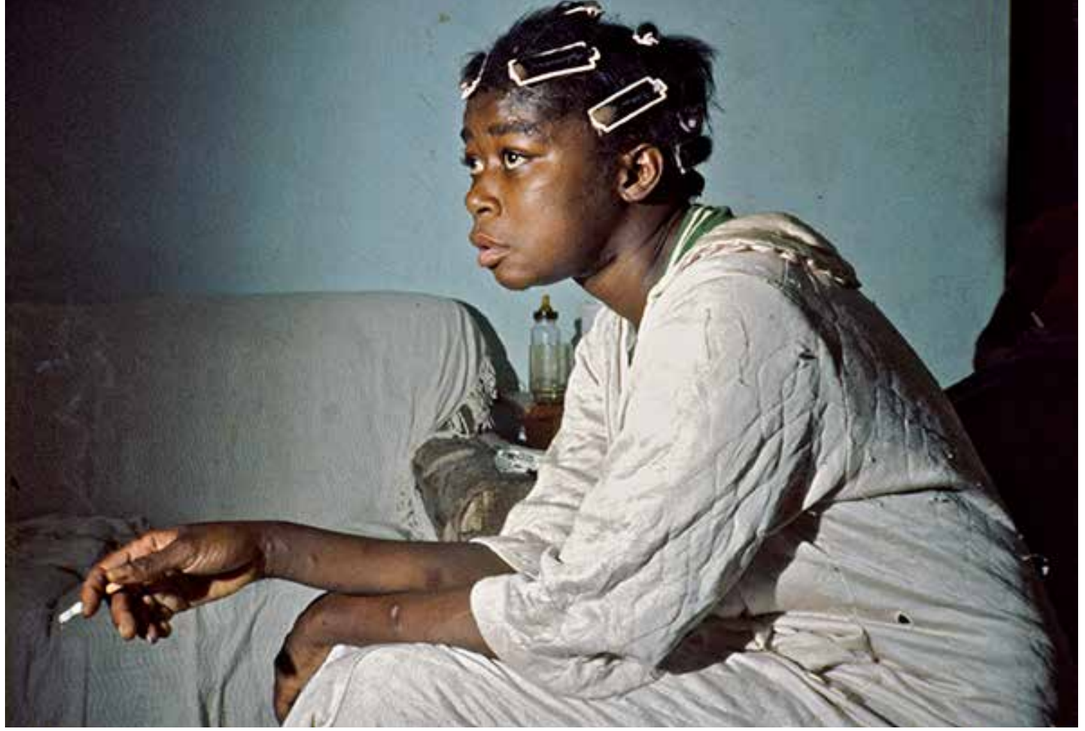


1974 - Jersey City, NJ

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”

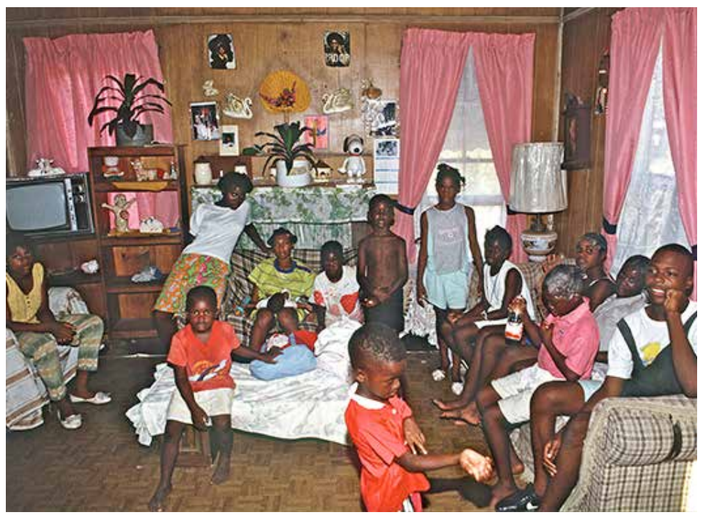
American welfare mothers are usually put in special poorhouses, often near garbage dumps or noisy freeways, where land is cheap. Such “housing for the poor” is the official banishment of untouchables. Every city has such dehumanizing “projects,” ostracizing people in a pariah culture so destructive that in the end they become useless to society. By sequestering the welfare mother, the population can continue blaming the victims without ever having to see what kind of suffering it is inflicting on them.



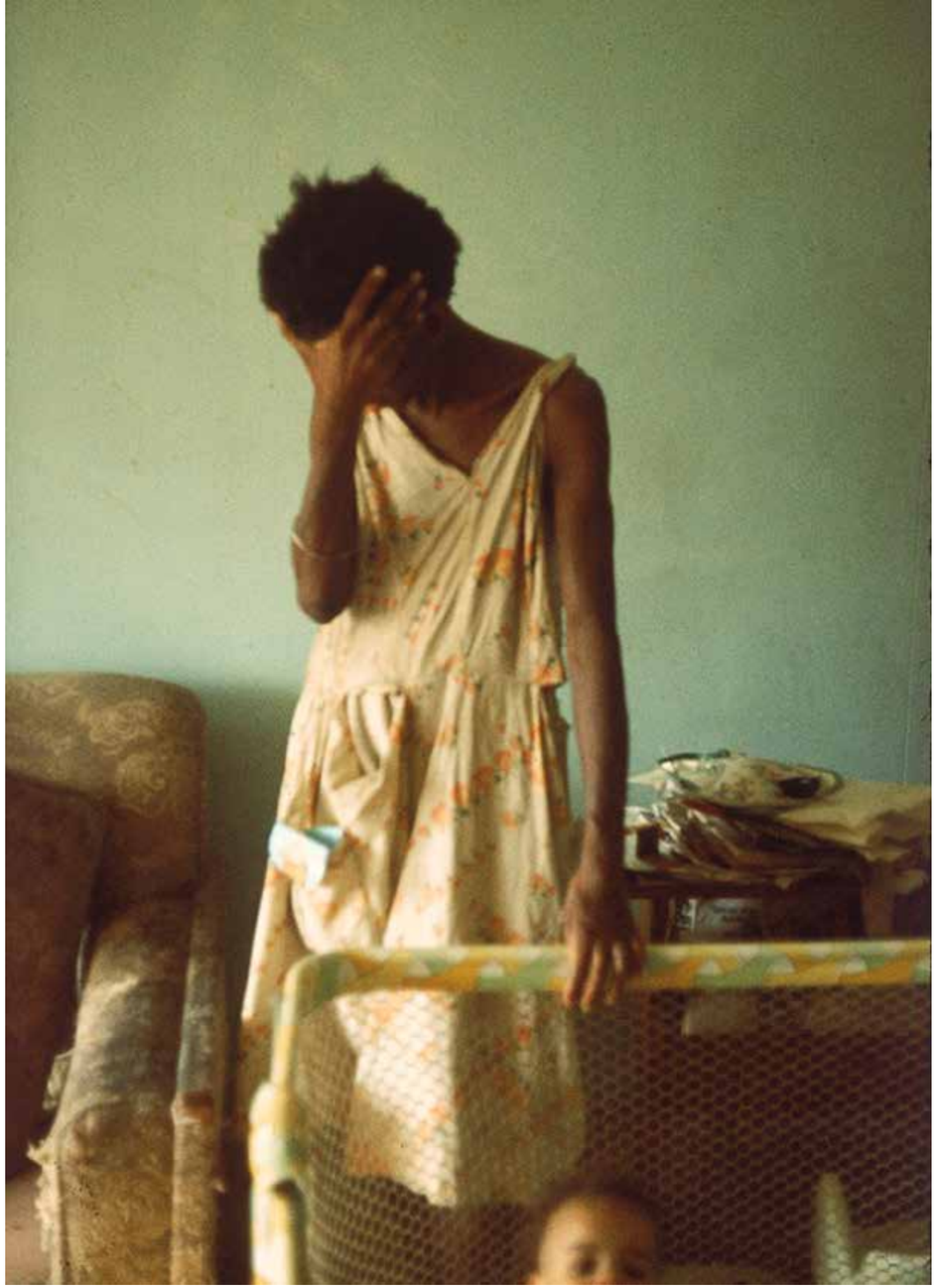
1974 - Jersey City, NJ

.....Untouchable Children

In such isolation and with a sense of being society’s garbage dump, children in the projects are easily nudged into crime. When I stayed with Nell Hall [page 318], I found that she often didn’t go to the welfare office or shopping for fear of having to walk through the project she lived in. 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 society trying to compete in the cut-throat globalization race can afford to lose so much of its 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

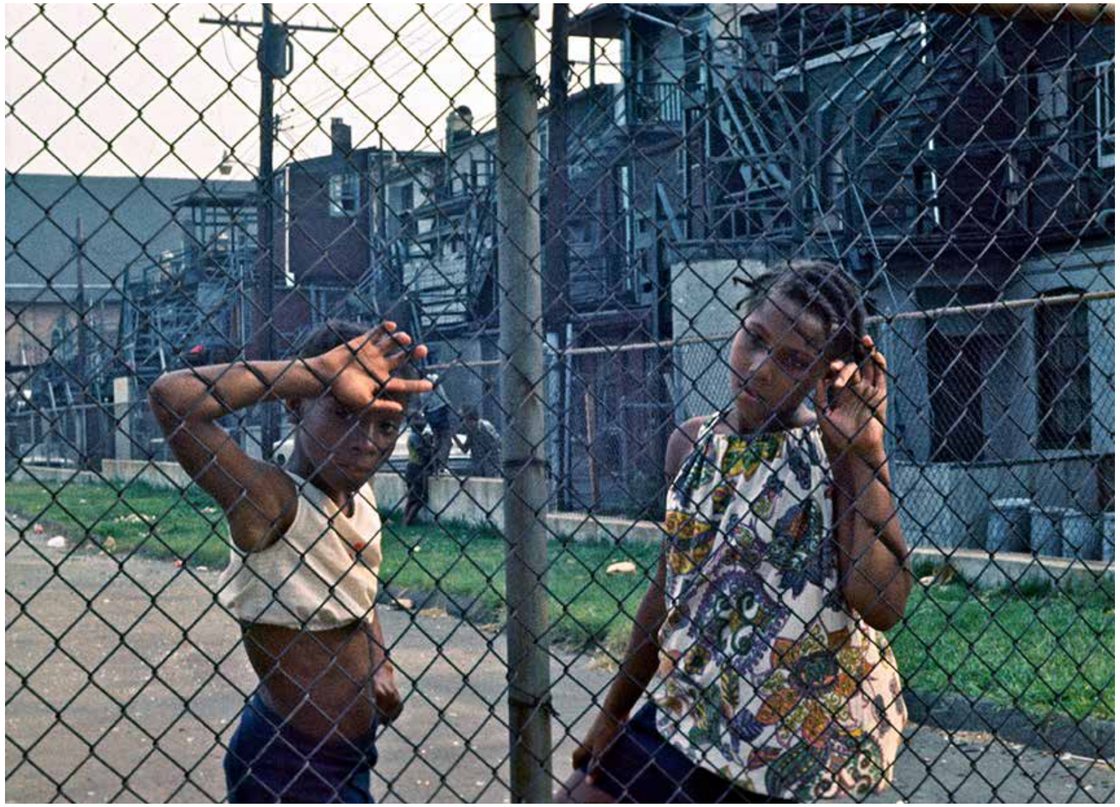
Facing our Ghetto Creations: My Baltimore Mugger's Story

"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 caught in the vicious circle of dependence and underclass pathology often turn to crime to survive. This was the case with my friend Alphonso in Baltimore. We met when he and his street gang tried to rob me. Alphonso's wife had a job in a coffee shop, which gave the family about 1/3 of the lowest Danish wage. In America there's an underworld of millions of service workers who are mercilessly exploited because Congress won't support a decent minimum wage. Thus, the US has more menial service jobs than any other developed country.

Alphonso and his wife loved each other and their six children dearly, and it hurt him immensely that he was unable to find a job to support his family. It was my first year in America, and I remember how shocked I was 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 they wouldn't be forced into crime. I was therefore very moved that in order to survive Alphonso had to rob in the street. 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 nice home and even rent a car a couple of times a year to take his children on a picnic.
When I returned a year later, his children were dejected but wouldn't tell me why. I found out Alphonso had been sentenced to more than six years in prison. Visiting him at the penitentiary, I discovered that his oldest son was in prison with him. When the family suddenly lost his income, the son had attempted a bank robbery.

Here is Alphonso's wife on a visit to the prison. For the next six years she wasn't able to touch her husband and could only hear him through noisy monitored telephones. Thousands of black marriages have been dissolved this way. Thus, modern society has institutionalized the legacy of chattel slavery by destroying the black family and keeping large parts of it in an underclass—to the delight of us who win by getting our services at artificially low wages— but in horror of that minority who give up and try to make a living through crime instead. Before Alphonso's gang tried to rob me, he'd been an active idealist in the Black Panthers, trying to change the conditions of what they called the "lumpenproletariat." When the Panthers were crushed by the FBI, he abandoned his belief that conditions could be changed and became both a heroin addict and a drug dealer in his gang.



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

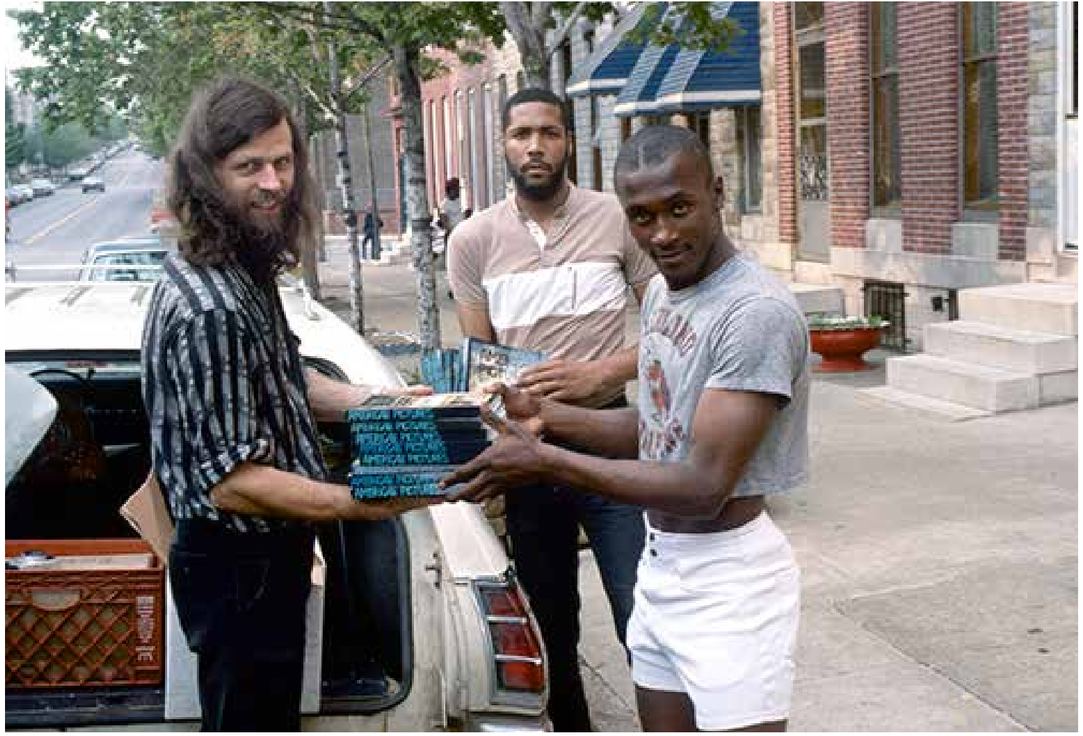
That most white people do not want to keep anyone in such a slave system was evident from the question they frequently asked when I started lecturing: "What can I do?" I was frustrated at first because I didn't have a good answer, but oddly enough this book gave me the answer to my own white disempowerment. When the book became a bestseller in Europe, American publishers scrambled to get it, but I found that they didn't have a single black employee (except for low-paid service workers). I didn't want to support such institutionalized racism with my book, and 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 having a white publisher print the book, I decided to let the ultimate victims of racism make their own money from it in a primitive attempt at redistribution. So I had the book printed in Denmark and shipped it to the US. It was a fun couple of years building up a large network of street vendors in the ghettos of the big cities. In particular, I got the homeless and criminals like Alphonso's gang to sell. Brilliant, they thought, because "now we can get money for our drugs without going to jail. But the most important thing, which is what all anti-racism work is about, was that we were helping to create a dialogue between whites and blacks. Because when my book vendors went out on the street to sell the book to white people, they had to control their rage and be empathetic in order to get white people to buy the book without threatening them. "Don't hit the whites with a gun," I said. "Hit them over the head with my book. It has all your angry arguments in it." I tried to teach these losers in almost the same words I taught the white winners of the universities: "Don't fear blacks, try to love them and see all the love you get right back." Empathy is the first step to all reconciliation. Even though my experiments with gangsters were only an experiment and did not mean any real social change, it was instructive and uplifting to hear these dialogues between whites and blacks—especially when I brought gangsters like Alphonso into the schools to talk to the students and persuade them to come into the ghettos to buy my book. It wasn't always the best way to sell books—my gangster salesmen, including Alphonso's son Nathaniel and a Philadelphia seller, for example, were murdered before they could pay me, and then there were the books, in the shopping carts of the homeless, that were destroyed by rain—but the dialog was a learning experience for all parties.

Although Alphonso often disappeared when I brought him books, I never realized how big a sinner he was until in 2005 he told my wife, "I don't understand what happened when your husband came here as a young man, and we tried to rob him and instead became friends. Because as you know, Vibeke, I'm not our Lord's best child. Since I met Jacob, 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, it was like walking into a locked-down Fort Knox so terrified were the students of Alphonso's gang, who lurked in the streets around the university where one of the doctors was kidnapped and found in a trunk. But miraculously, both of the gangster's daughters married pastors, and made Alphonso go to church in his old age they. Now I couldn't find him out on the streets on Sundays, Saturdays, and Wednesday nights. Now he'd stand in the church and shout, "Hallelujah, I was a sinner, but I found God."

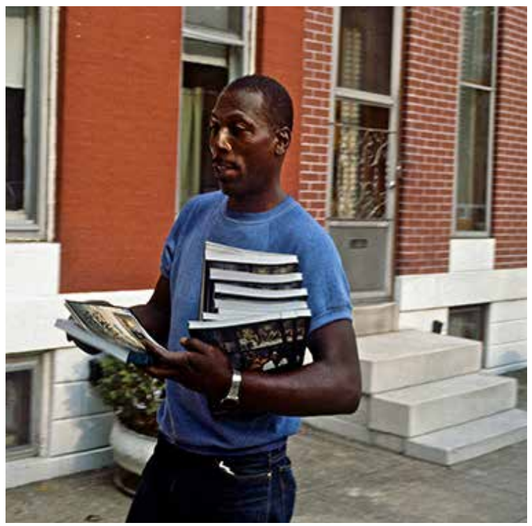
I would even sit and read the Bible with him during my visits, just as my wife and daughter were immediately drawn into prayer together. I had always seen the deeper goodness and love in Alphonso, and now saw through his daughters' involvement how little it really took to set him free—just as I'd seen it in so many other children of wrath I had known over the years 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.

Trying to find Alphonso - on Danish TV in 1992



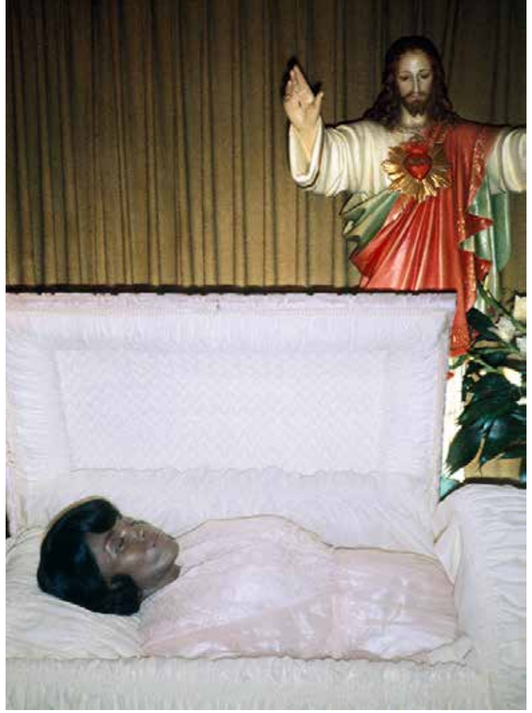
1985 in the streets of Johns Hopkins Medical School. I deliver books to Alphonso's son, Nathaniel, who was murdered before he could pay me up

1986 - Alphonso's gang selling books

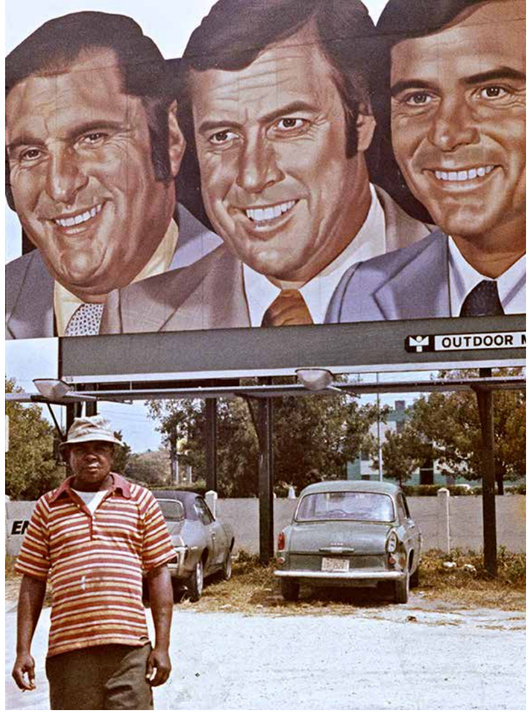


1986- Alphonso sells books. Most of his gang died from murder or AIDS. He died in 2014

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 time as a drifter and through the' 80s, I often heard liberal whites trying to explain the economic attacks on black families. According to their theory, the black family was dysfunctional because black manhood was suppressed during slavery, while women struggled to survive. This "matriarchy" led to an upbringing of children that replicated a "tangle of pathology," resulting in a population with no opportunity for success.

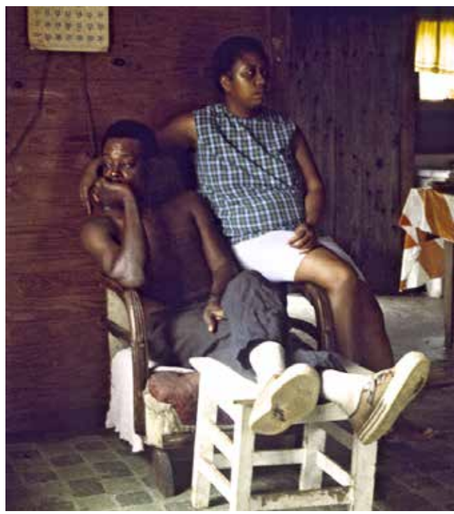
This line of thinking stems from the Johnson government's "Moynihan Report," but it is unclear whether the report was simply a product of the racism and patriarchal structures of the time, with its "blame the victim" approach. With progressive civil rights thinking permeating both conservatives and liberals, the question arises: Which came first? The massive gaslighting from so high up must have emotionally manipulated victims to doubt their own experiences. When the effects of continued oppression seemed to "confirm" the pattern, the oppressed easily come to believe the myths that justify the power structure. White attempts to portray ghetto men as weak are internalized by the outcasts and create low self-esteem.

This leads lower-class men to devalue their own abilities and abandon education and job training, further confirming racist stereotypes. In the '80s I saw a growing divide between men and women in the ghetto, which hid a new master-slave system in which the "slave" was no longer needed. As unskilled laborers, they were no longer needed in the US. Nor were immigrants in Europe since low-income jobs now belonged to developing countries.

Today, leftists in particular see this development as a result of "systemic racism." But by blaming "something else," we once again avoid taking responsibility for our own discrimination. The stubborn white resistance to affirmative action to give blacks access to the higher education needed to help them rise above the lower class continued to grow until the Supreme Court in 2023 struck down "affirmative action."

We in the dominant caste must always ask ourselves if we are responsible for the political rhetoric that contributes to the impoverishment of the subordinate caste. In moments of difficulty, we can all fall into the racist contradictions of insincerity that are endlessly exploited by politicians.

When we see an increase in marital violence among blacks and our immigrants in Denmark, for example, we only see the tragedy of the oppressed and ignore the damage our morbid fixation on the victim does to our own psyche. When this 26-year-old woman is shot by her unemployed husband, we must ask ourselves: What role did we ourselves play in this tragic event?



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, which has been shaped by centuries of slavery and systematic oppression, has deep roots in the American psyche. While slave-based society portrayed the black man as a threat, the black woman was subjected to systematic dehumanization. Few countries have allowed an entire race of women to suffer systematic rape and then blame the victims. The black woman was humiliated by being publicly sold and whipped, naked. This was also done to cover up the guilt that came with the abuse. Moreover, the white woman's fear of "losing" her husband to the black woman was fueled by racist myths about black women's morality.

This devaluation of black women created deep wounds that many still carry today. I experienced this at Harvard Law School when female black students reacted to my few photographs of bare-breasted women, all of which were later exhibited in museums as photographic art.

They didn't think 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 that black women have developed strong defense mechanisms against white men in response to centuries of abuse. After careful consideration, it was decided that I could use the images as long as I conveyed this context to white viewers. Their discomfort with my photographs was due to the fact that many black women have internalized beauty ideals that devalue black bodies and nudity.

Even when a black woman chooses to enter into a relationship with a white man, she often faces 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).

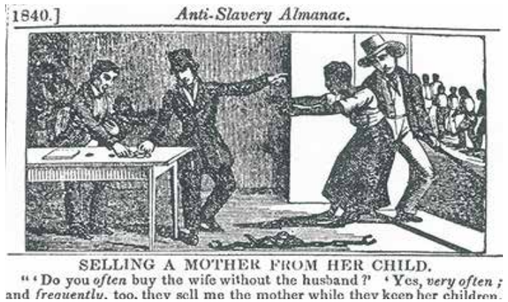
Leslie later had a child with another white man, and I saw the same pattern with my few other black girlfriends; they all later married whites while none of their siblings did. So my few mixed relationships were the result of exceptional women consciously breaking the deep-rooted social control that minority groups use to protect themselves from oppression.

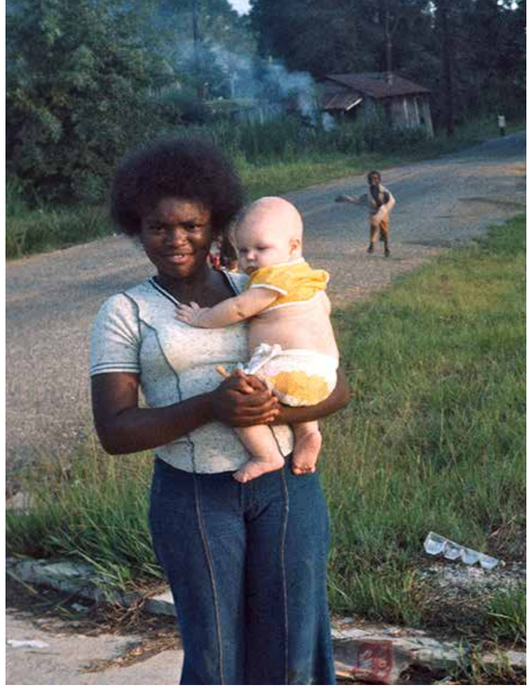
We see the same kind of social control among other minorities, such as Jews and European Muslims, who oppose marriages outside their own group. This protective but oppressive dynamic has parallels in our own history in Europe, where during World War II women were punished for having relationships with German soldiers. Today, we may struggle to understand the hostility that was once directed toward love, but the dynamics behind this resistance to "fraternizing" with the oppressor are still relevant. In Europe, we continue to see strong social control, with many vulnerable minorities resisting marriage with the majority population. In the US, where they have traditionally felt more welcome, nearly 40 percent of Muslims marry whites or Christians, while only 6 percent of blacks enter into mixed marriages.

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

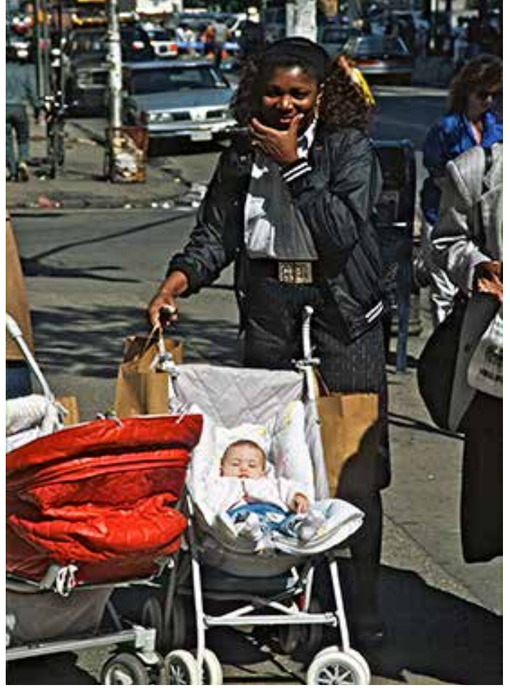
See my girlfriend Leslie about our rebellion against social pressure in the TV movie here from 2015





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

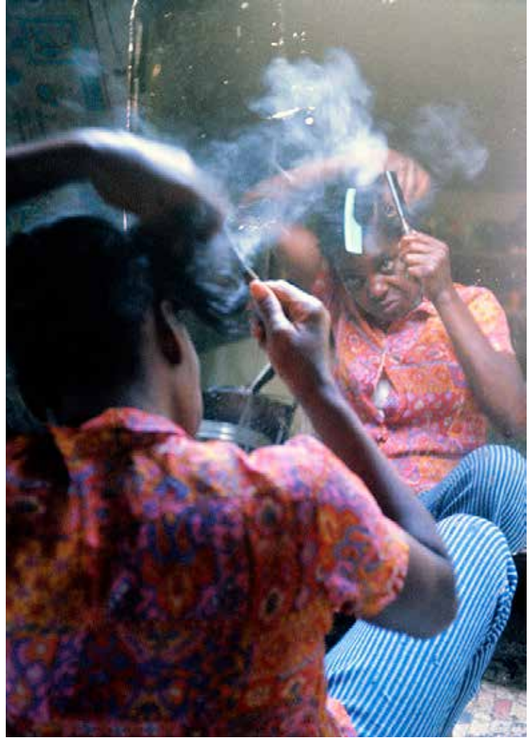
"Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, 'the mule of the world,' because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else—everyone else—refused to carry." - Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens

Black women have historically carried a heavy burden in white households, both as caregivers and devalued servants. Many were forced to raise white children, a task that removed them from their own families. At once, they were expected to show affection and care while being considered subordinate in a society that didn't recognize their full worth. While the white woman, especially in the South, was idealized, Aunt Jemima folklore iconically stereotyped the black woman as the self-sacrificing "mama" who loves her white children as much as her own. She was forced to suppress her own emotions to appear in racial mythology as excessively strong and able to endure hardship and pain bordering on the inhuman—an image reinforced by watching the victim discipline her own children with a heavy hand to prepare them for life in a racist society. Personally, I didn't find the upbringing harder than among ghettoized people in other countries, such as Denmark.

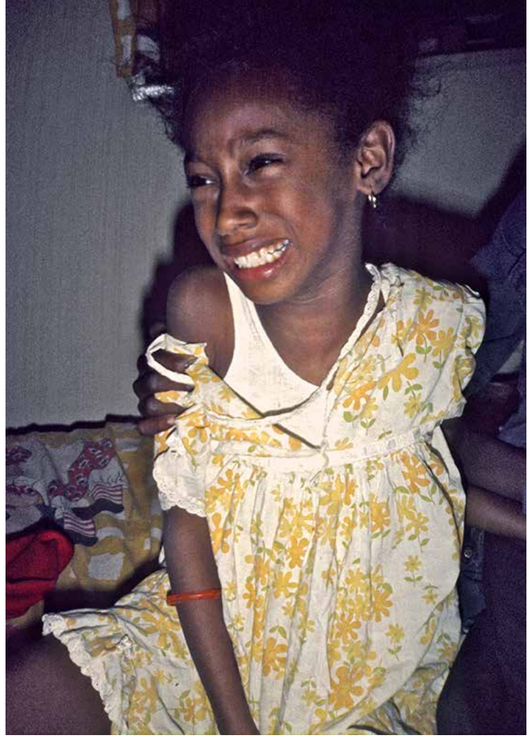
That such dehumanization is also devastating for the oppressor himself is especially evident in the South, where, paradoxically, the white elite insists on the de facto separation of the two races in public but at home strives to abolish this divide. I often hear students in my workshops, especially in elite universities, talk about how devastating this hypocritical double message is for white children. Often with tears in their voices, they recount how they formed lifelong bonds with their black nannies, frequently stronger than with their own working parents. But along with this love came a sense of shame when their parents unexpectedly came home and "caught" them in the middle of an intimate moment with their nanny. "I froze with shame" I often heard about feelings they were forbidden to have for black people and still haunted them as adults.

The New York Post, for example, reported in 2018 on a case in which a white mother mistakenly sent a racist text message about her black nanny to the wrong recipient—the nanny herself. Instead of looking the nanny in the eye, she fired her, and the young woman sued the wealthy family for breach of contract. The incident shows that although social conditions have changed, racial tensions and power differences still lie beneath the surface in today's society.

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

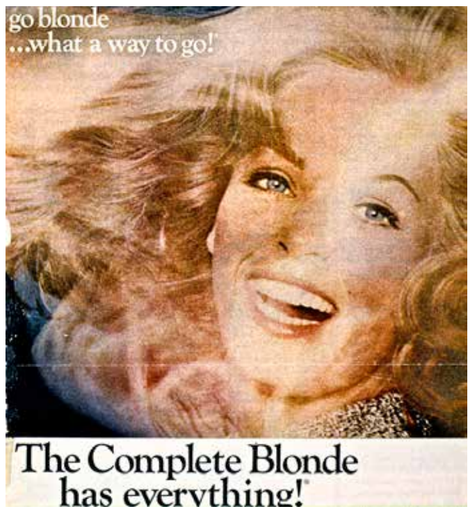
"It's funny about 'passing.' We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it."
—Nella Larsen, from her novel Passing

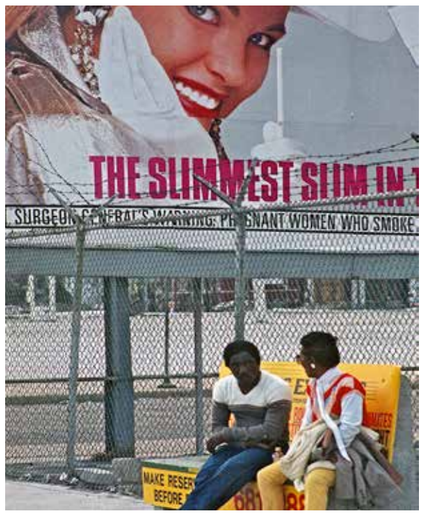
The historical worship of "pure" and idealized white femininity continues to shape beauty standards in advertising and popular culture, which has had a devastating effect on non-white and religiously veiled women. For generations, they've been told that fair skin and straight hair are the ideal of beauty.
This led to the use of skin-whitening creams and painful hair straightening methods to "pass" for white.

These practices became not only a physical but also a psychological burden that affected their self-esteem and identity. Their children, who endured similar torture with the flat iron heated over the gas, inevitably reasoned that if they must endure so much pain to become acceptable 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 blaming and teasing each other endlessly for having dark skin and curly hair.
Yes, our massive "gaslighting" has profound consequences.

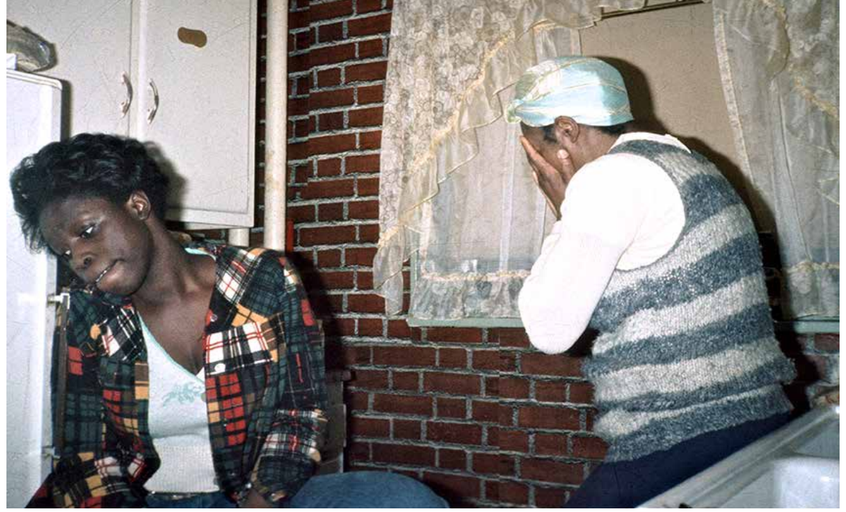
1975 - Seattle

1975 - San Francisco

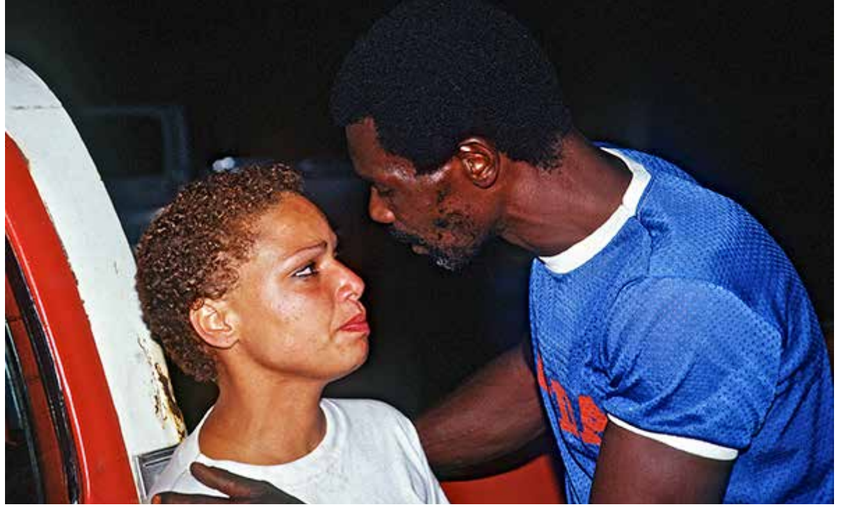




1990 - Chicago



1974 - Astoria, Queens, NY



1992 - Bullock County, AL

1995 - Pahokee, FL

Race and gender: On violence against black and brown women

"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, a leading scholar in critical race theory and the concept of intersectionality

Historically, non-white women have faced multiple layers of intersectional violence. The fights I so often witnessed in lower-class homes led me to believe that many black men's views of women had been deeply influenced by the white social ideal. What depresses me most is not that nearly 70 percent of black families now have only one parent, but rather what I see in the still-intact nuclear families. Nothing is more hurtful than hearing the deeply ingrained white thinking—"You ain't shit, nigger" or "ugly bitch"—echoed in the endless arguments 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 in the United States are committed by blacks, who make up only 13 percent of the population.

Physical and psychological violence against women is horrifically high worldwide. The fact that it is 35 percent higher for blacks than whites unfortunately only reflects the greater absence of black men with jobs. In Denmark, violence against immigrant women is exploding, and they now make up 42 percent of women in shelters. Here too, we often see violence as something that stems from "their" cultures rather than from our marginalization.

We forget that our rejection and our failure to include these women and men in our social lives mirror the way American whites treat black people as unloved. The result is a closed-mindedness among victims who are trapped in cultures they want to escape. The violence we perpetrate by not giving them a sense of belonging turns against ourselves and our society's sense of belonging. When it comes to intersectionality, it is essential to reflect on "our" role in this dynamic without falling into paternalistic or patronizing narratives.

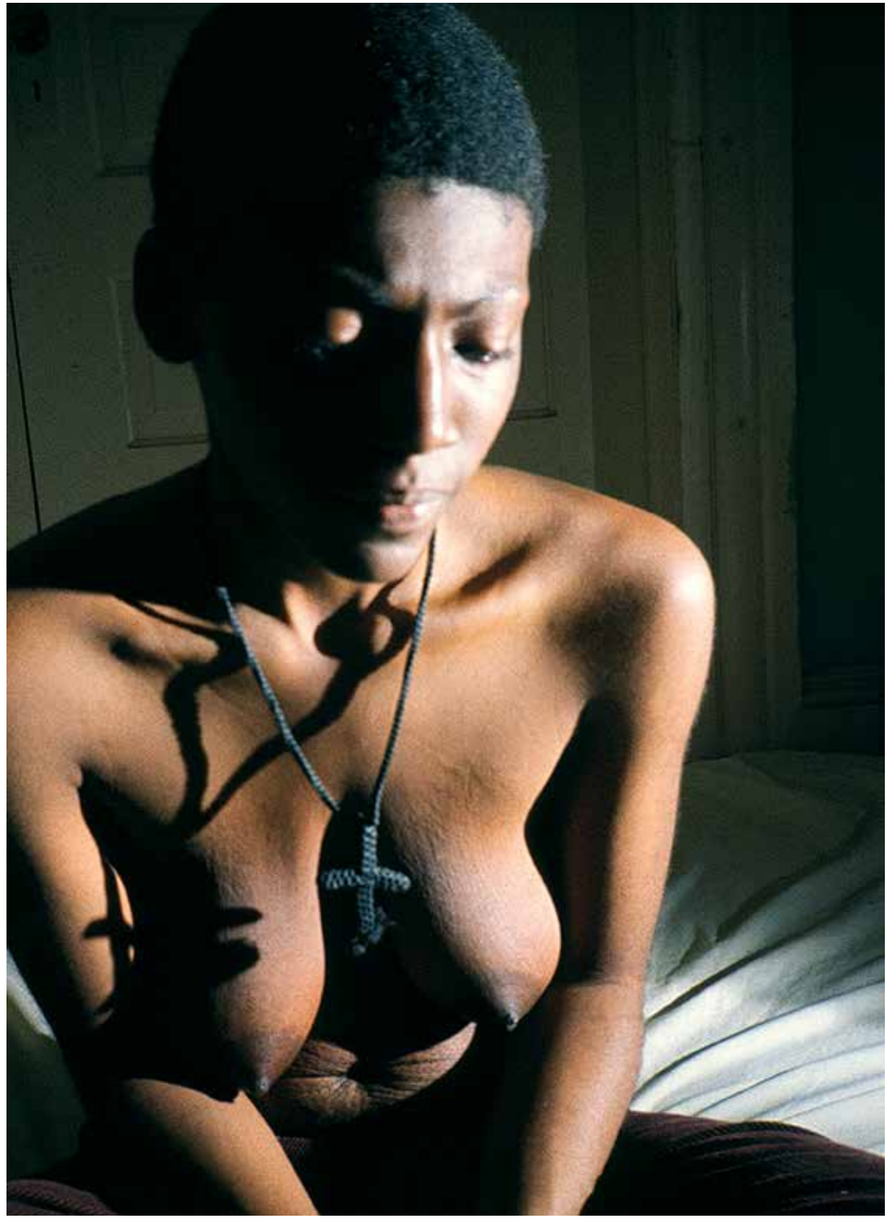
Bessie Christian seen on page 201 talking about the violence she suffered by her husband.

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

The only time I managed to talk somebody out of a robbery was through a strange combination of circumstances in Greensboro, North Carolina. I was living with a black social worker, Tony, whose father owned one of the worst bars in the black ghetto. I used to hang out at the bar at night. One night I met two young black women of the criminal type there, and we decided that I should go home with them. First, we stole some wine from a store, dashing right out into a waiting taxi. When we were in the back seat, I asked them how they intended to pay for the cab since I knew they had no money. "Don't worry," they said, "just wait. Let us take care of it. When we get there, we'll just knock him down and take all his money." This took me a bit by surprise since I'd never tried mugging a taxi driver before, but I kept quiet, which is one of the first things I learned to do in America. Suddenly, the black driver turned around to ask something, and I realized that I knew him. He was Tony's grandfather, and he owned the biggest black taxi company in town. I very rarely take matters into my own hands in America, but I certainly did then. I shouted "Stop!" to the driver and said that he could get the fare the next day through his grandson. Then I tore the purse with the gun in it from the woman's hands and pushed them both out the car door while they gaped at me (just like the taxi driver). Out on the street I shouted, "That was Tony's grandfather, you idiots!" Though they knew Tony, this fact would naturally not have stopped them, but when they were out of the car and the taxi had driven off, they at least had no chance of hurting him.

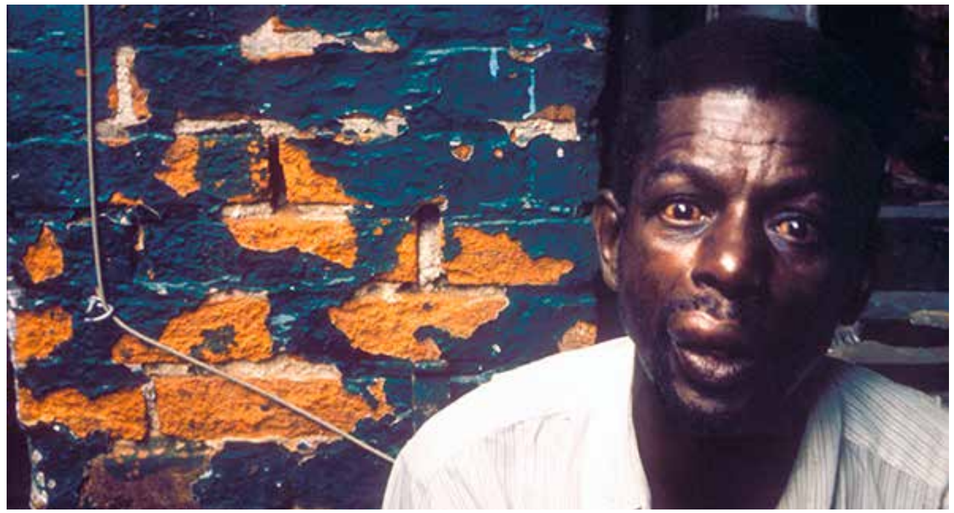
I was often shocked by the brutality that some of these women displayed; I witnessed actions directed at both men and women. This is why it was such an overwhelming experience when a friendship developed between us and I got a glimpse of the warm humanity under the hard shell of violence and backstabbing. The violence that had become part of their everyday lives had shaped their behavior in a way that closed off the care and tenderness that might otherwise have flourished. These women clearly longed for freedom and a different way of life, but the violent dynamic that surrounded them made it difficult for them to act differently. Unfortunately, this longing was all too often stifled by the constant tension between them and the ghetto's other prisoners. The better-off black or white communities didn't understand this struggle, and I often encountered a disdain for ghetto culture, which only exacerbated the situation. 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 I came to Jacksonville, Florida, and met Diane, a sweet black woman who asked her mother to let me stay with them overnight, but her mother didn't want a white person under her roof. Then Diane took me to the house of a friend, who was a prostitute, but her boyfriend wouldn't put me up either. We walked around all evening trying this possibility and that. The prostitute got more and more interested in trying to get us a place to stay. The two of them agreed that she should "turn a trick" with a white taxi driver while I sat waiting in a café.

After a while they came running back, looking very upset, and said that I should come quick. We got a room in a motel, and I discovered that they had far more than the ten dollars you usually get for a "blow job" on the street. I asked them how they got it, but they wouldn't say. Only later did they tell me about it. It turned out that one of them had lured the white man into a dark alley, where she did the "job." But then she suddenly grabbed a big brick at her side and hit the man over the head. Since he didn't fall down unconscious immediately, she took a steel pipe and hit him in the head again and again until, apparently, he was dead. Then she took his wallet and ran back to the other woman, who had stood in the background watching the whole thing. The thing was that 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. But as we all three lay there in a double bed in the motel, they were obviously in anguish; it turned out they were both very religious. For several hours they prayed, "Oh God, God, please don't let him die!" It was a nervous, stammering prayer in between attempts to find a vein to shoot up in. By the next morning they'd already forgotten the whole thing. They worried more about having overslept and being late for church, where they were supposed to be singing in the choir.

Letter to a friend

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



1973 - Baltimore

1974 - Oakland, CA

Måske sort baggrund her på højre side

1975 - Las Vegas, NV

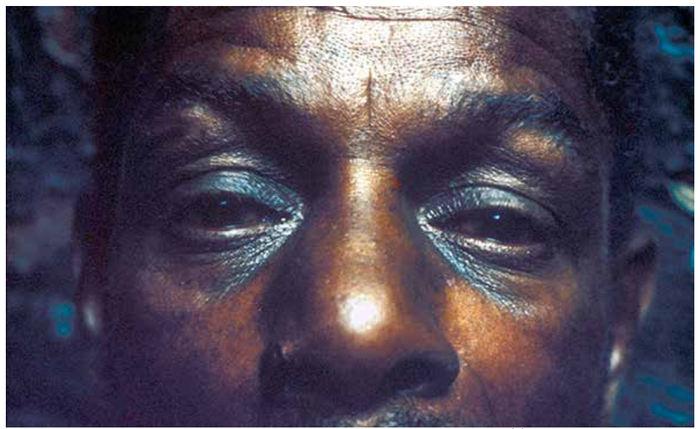
Illusions of Abundance: The Unreachable American Dream

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

In our attempts to confront the realities of the ghetto, we risk perpetuating the ghetto by excluding and stereotyping its residents. Is it a defense mechanism to protect us against the guilt that comes with confronting our own prejudices and the structures that maintain injustice? Although our discriminatory barriers are built out of fear and can be maintained only because our pariahs rarely have the power to threaten anyone but each other, they still cause discomfort and anxiety in all of us.
We're therefore challenged, even by a homeless veteran, to give away a mere dollar (and thereby feel better about ourselves). Many of us have become so influenced by the pattern of oppression we've created that we avoid engaging with him directly. This includes not only listening to people like him, but also recognizing the role we've played in their lives—from ignoring their contributions to the prosperity of our society to supporting the wars they've been sent to fight (for a freedom they rarely enjoyed).
Do we dare to come out of our echo chambers and face him?
Dare we admit the price he pays for our freedom? The freedom that often produces only dependency and injustice? Our involvement in foreign aid or social programs can give us a false sense of morality while ignoring the structural problems that harm the most vulnerable. We bombard the world's poor daily with talk of freedom without allowing them to enjoy the benefits of freedom—and reserve to ourselves the freedom to build walls to keep them out.

1973 - Baltimore

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



1973 - Baltimore

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

1974 - Apopka, FL

The paradox of a closed system in a free society

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

I discovered a great difference in the degree to which the psychological terror of Florida's slave camps affected blacks of different ethnicities. Jamaican blacks, for example, were the only ones to surprise me by keeping their camps neat, whereas Americans threw garbage all over their camps.
Some researchers suggest that these differences can be traced back to different forms of slavery. In Latin America and the Caribbean, slavery was often characterized by more open, feudal structures, where the Church protected slave families from being separated and provided opportunities for upward mobility and freedom. In America, on the other hand, slavery was capitalist: Even the Church defined the slave as a commodity, more animal than human, and there was no possibility even of psychological escape. Unlike the open, feudalistic system, the American form of slavery was a closed system that devastated the mind by crushing all hope.
Slavery in the US has been compared to the German concentration camps, where it was possible to study the effects of a completely closed system on people. Diaries written by intellectuals imprisoned in concentration camps show how in a short time they were degraded to subhuman status and began to develop a psyche similar to the average slave in the US, including an almost loving attitude toward the camp guards (or at least not outright hatred). This led to total resignation and a sense of irresponsibility and infantilism in many prisoners.

As tempting as it is for liberals to use such theories to explain the peculiar nature of the black American underclass, liberals need to bear in mind that they are once again putting the blame on something that happened more than a hundred years ago. If they see black Americans today as representative of a "character" that was shaped in slavery, they perpetuate the damaging narrative that integration is impossible because of inherited traits. The victim is again blamed for not being integrated. But the fact is that the victim's imprints show that slavery is alive and well to this day. West Indian immigrants who share a history of slavery generally integrate into American society more easily. The problem lies not in innate character traits, but in the continued marginalization of native-born black Americans in a society that still confines and shapes its undesirables in a kind of closed system.

1974 - NYC

1974 - Morehead City, NC

1974 - New Bern, NC

The Psychology of Oppression and Its Impact on Character

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

Until I became aware of the closed ghetto system, I was always astonished by how the minds of underclass children were crippled. Most young black children I meet are filled with a zest for life. But later they become easily depressed and withdraw into a shell as if to protect themselves from our all-pervading oppressive thinking about them. Very early on they acquire our negative expectations of them, and, beginning around fourth grade, they begin to lose faith in themselves, their abilities, and their future. They become so aware of the closed system they lose motivation and fall behind whites in school (exactly as we see with our unloved brown children in Denmark).

But the strongest indication of our oppression is without doubt black self-hatred, the self-hatred that makes ghetto children tear the hair out of their black dolls or draw themselves in the corner of the paper (white kids usually place themselves in the middle). It is the self-hatred that makes people react violently against their surroundings, throwing trash everywhere, for example, or "backstabbing," both verbally and literally. Many people suffer from a little self-loathing, but the self-disdain in the American underclass is so severe that it helps confer on the ghetto one of the world's highest rates of crime and family disintegration as well as perhaps the smallest degree of mutual trust.

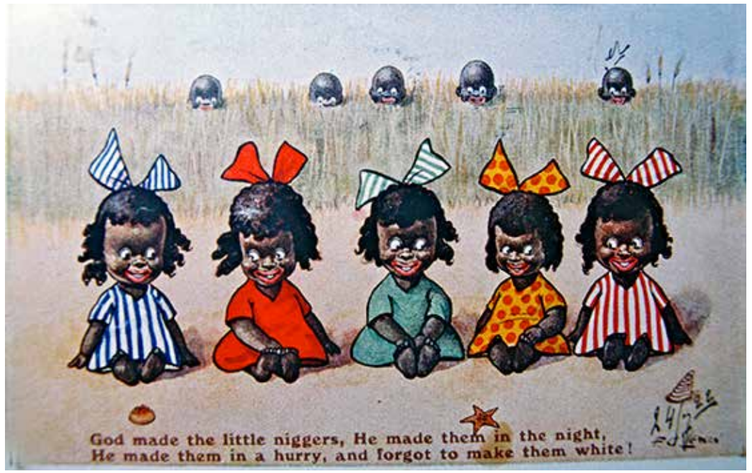
When we see how aggression, as always with the oppressed, is more often directed at fellow victims than at the oppressor, when we experience the uncontrollable anger in American blacks, we begin to understand the effect of the closed system we've confined them to: the ghetto, or slavery here and now!

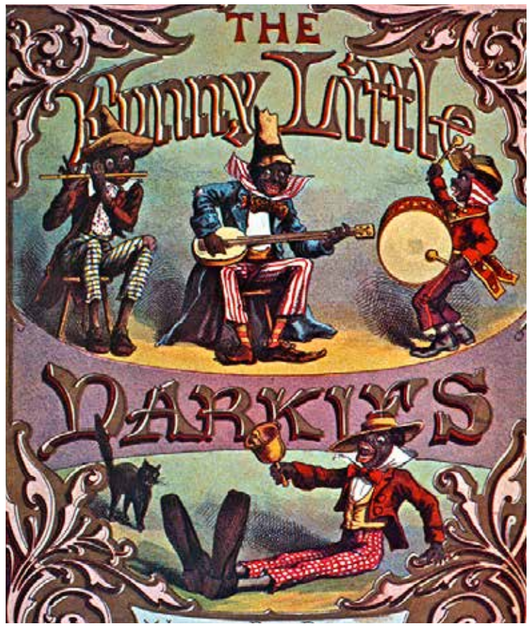
1996 - rural Selma, AL

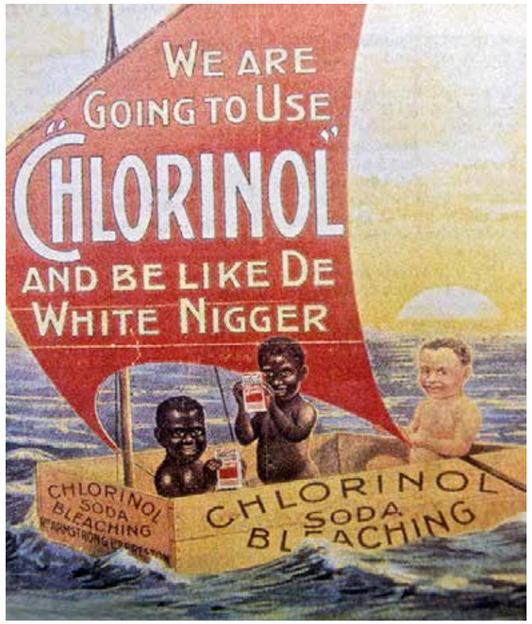
"The worst crime the white has ever committed was to teach us to hate ourselves." - Malcolm X

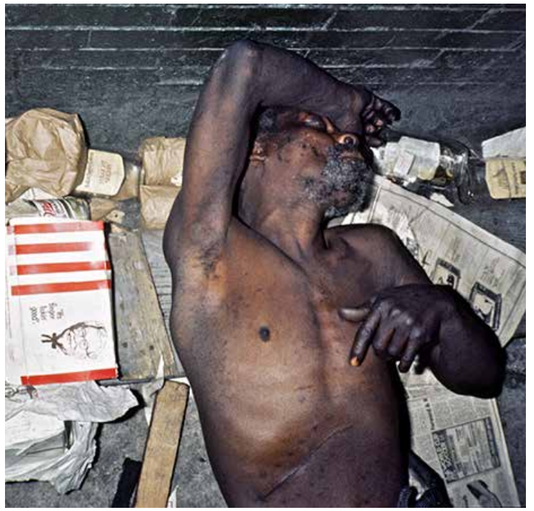
"No other group has internalized its self-hatred as much as blacks have. It would be difficult to find other groups who behave similarly in that their most esteemed members berate its poorest members." - Michael Eric Dyson

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

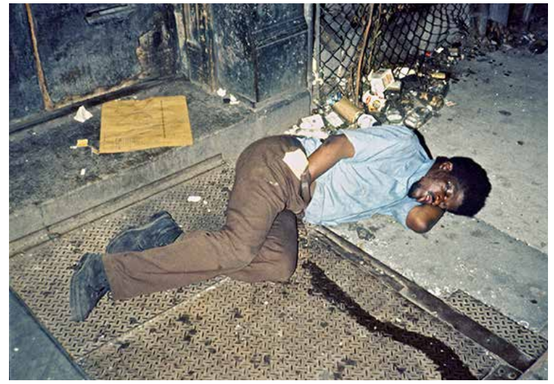








1974 - NYC

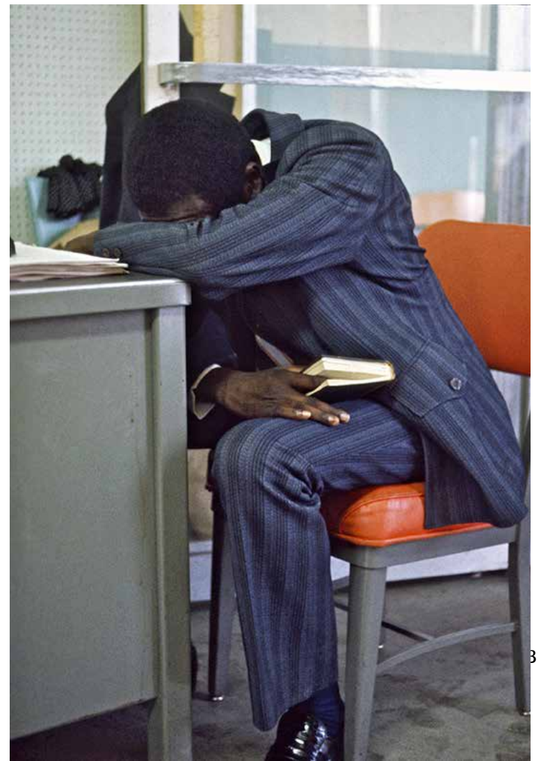


1974 - NYC

1992 - NYC - Right 1974 - Liberty City, FL

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

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



Black figures in the Danish National Museum

1989 - rural VA

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

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

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

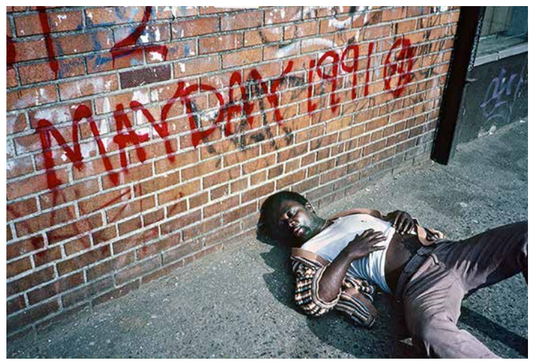
1986 - restaurants throughout the South

1974 - Jacksonville, FL

1989 - rural VA

1990 - set på universiteterne hvor jeg holdt foredrag

2000 - NYC



1992 - NYC

Historical photo: White colonizer carried by Africans

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

1973 - near Natzhez, MS

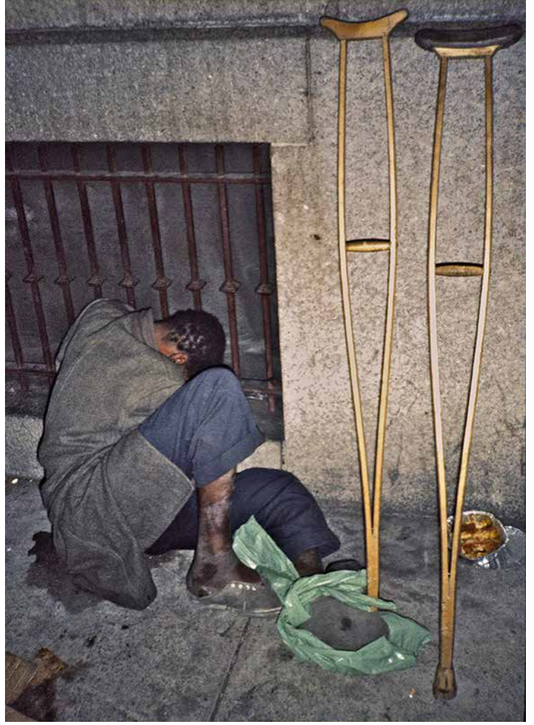
1973 - New Orleans

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

1997 - NYC

1973 - Philadelphia, PA

1973 - Baltimore



1975 - NYC

1973 - NYC

1973 - NYC

Muligvis sort baggrund

How Immigrant Blacks overcome the Legacy of Slavery

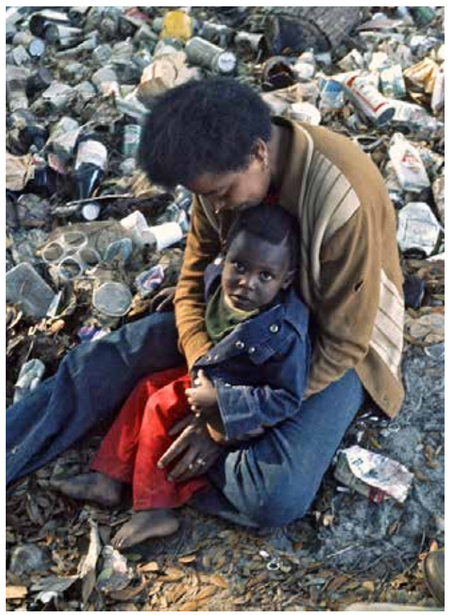
"There is a certain sense of pride that West Indian blacks have, which I think comes from our history of resisting colonialism. We were never slaves in the same way that American blacks were slaves." - Michael Eric Dyson, professor of African-American studies

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

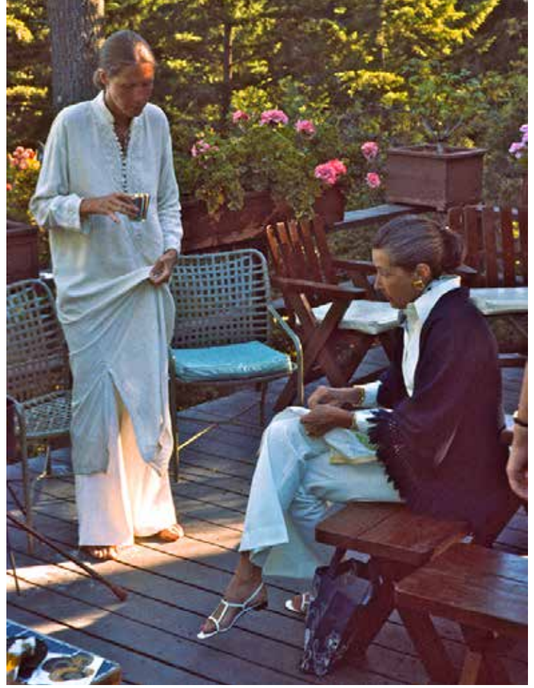
During my journey in the nation with more talk about upward mobility than any other, and with its seemingly unlimited opportunities, the existence of a closed system was a recurrent paradox for me. I couldn't accept the explanation about blacks' inherent inferiority, which all white Americans carry in their innermost hearts. "Our ancestors came over dirt poor and made it. Why can't they?" A veil was, however, lifted for me when I got close to two such "poor" immigrants: Lidy Manselles from Haiti and Mrs. Pabst from Russia. It's not at all a coincidence that Lidy became my first black girlfriend. At first American-born black women seemed untouchable, locked up behind an invisible barrier. Lidy clearly belonged to another, freer world. Never did that strike me so much as one day when we stood talking to an alcoholic on a doorstep in Harlem. All of a sudden Lidy burst out with contempt: "Why don't you get a job?" Her insensitivity ended the conversation. Later she even said something like, "I hate them. I hate these lazy animals." I immediately felt that this was a clash far deeper than between two nationalities: It was the disdain of a free culture toward an enclosed slave culture. Lidy, who was jet black and Catholic, represented better than anyone the "white protestant work ethic." And she was no exception among those blacks who've arrived without chains. Through Lidy I gained access to the tightly knit West Indian community in Brooklyn. Like earlier immigrants, they worked fanatically hard, saved money, took pride in education and owning their own homes, and universally spoke of the importance of a strong family. With their sacrifice and fierce determination, they were staunchly opposed to welfare in direct contrast to the surrounding black communities, 40% of whose members are on welfare. Their neighborhoods are as clean and racist toward native blacks as Italian and Irish neighborhoods. In less than one generation, faster than most white immigrants, their income has reached a staggering 94% of the average American family income, even including the many poor (and Africans) still arriving. Since 1% of the American population own more than 30% of the wealth, we may find that West Indian immigrants are doing better than the majority of whites even though they come from much poorer and less educated countries than most Europeans came from. In contrast, native blacks make only 61% of white income. Under Lyndon Johnson's Civil Rights reforms, they were allowed a rate of progress that, perhaps in 500 years, would have given them equality, but under the conservative policies of Nixon, Reagan, and Bush, they are rapidly slipping backward. Until the 1960s 1/3 of all black professionals were in fact immigrants. In many elite universities, their descendants represent up to 85% of black students although they make up only 6% of blacks in the United States.

So why is it so hard for America's own blacks to get into Harvard or Yale? Whatever the reason, the fact that these low-income islands, with far fewer blacks than the United States, can produce such a wealth of talent is strong evidence of the impact of American racism. Their historical slavery was basically as cruel as the American variety, and they descended from the same tribes in Africa. So what makes black immigrants almost twice as successful as native blacks?

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



1974 - Apopka, FL



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

My explanation is that after slavery ended, whites disappeared from the West Indies, leaving behind a society in which blacks could find role models among their own kind and rebuild the self-confidence shattered by slavery.
In the U.S., however, blacks lived, and continue to live, alongside a white majority, whose power to define and dominate often undermines black self-esteem. This creates a challenge for black parents who want to encourage their children. Without a strong belief in themselves, they cannot say with the same conviction as West Indian or Jewish parents: "Yes, my child, there is racism here, but you can still make it if you work twice as hard." The initiative and resourcefulness of black immigrants aren't destroyed by facing, daily, the structural racism that's so detrimental to many native-born blacks. The psychological resilience of black immigrants allows them to thrive, just as European Jews often did despite anti-Semitism. Not surprisingly, my native black friends in Hartford refer to the city's West Indian immigrants as "go getters" or "black Jews." The native admiration reflects the recognition of immigrant striving and success in a society where black natives still struggle with the aftermath of historical oppression.

Mrs. Pabst had arrived just like Lidy—broke but not broken—with a background that sent her directly to the upper class. A member of the old Russian aristocracy, she lost everything in the revolution except the most important thing: her upper-class acculturation. She could therefore marry into money (Pabst Brewing Company) like the rest of the 2/3 of the richest 1% who were born into their wealth. Today they own several mansions around the world, and I vacationed with them on a $3 million farm in California. I liked Mrs. Pabst, intensely interested as she was in art and culture, and hoped she'd give me some money to buy more film rolls. So I showed her my photos, such as this little boy in the muddy ditch. His world is so different from that of Mrs. Pabst's granddaughter, whom the maid is serving, that if it didn't say Pabst on the beer cans we wouldn't know that they belong to the same world and that their lives are in some way connected with each other. But when Mrs. Pabst saw these photos of people defeated by apathy and alcoholism, she shouted, "I hate them! I hate these lazy animals! Why don't they want to work? Why don't they take a job?"
But where does Mrs. Pabst actually get all that gold in her ears, and why do these "animals" not work?

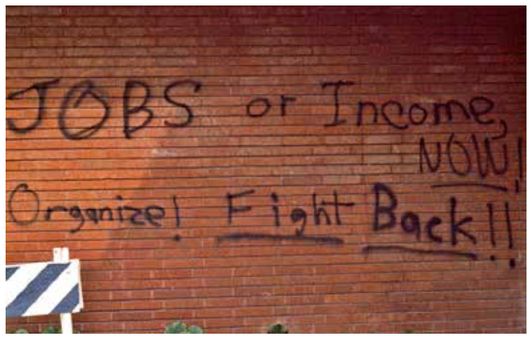
Always the last ones hired

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

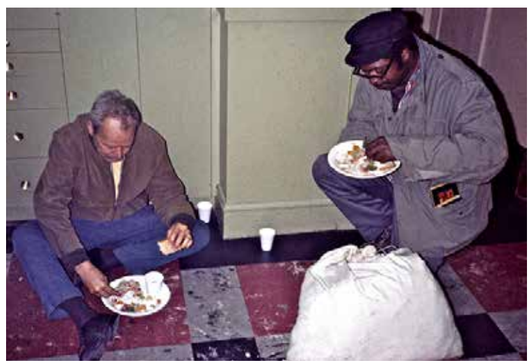
Sing a song of sad young men,
glasses full of rye.
All the news is bad again
kiss your dreams goodbye.
All the sad young men
sitting in the bars
drinking up the night
and missing all the stars.
All the sad young men
drifting through the town
drinking up the night
trying not to frown.
All the sad young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

Roberta Flack

1972 - Chicago



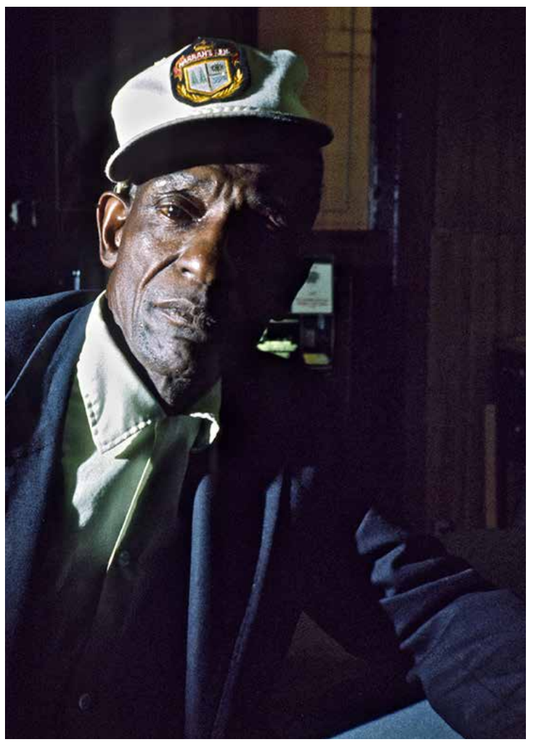
1975 - San Francisco



1975 - San Francisco

Sad young men - song by Roberta Flack - illustrated

1975 - San Francisco



1975 - San Francisco

1975 - San Francisco

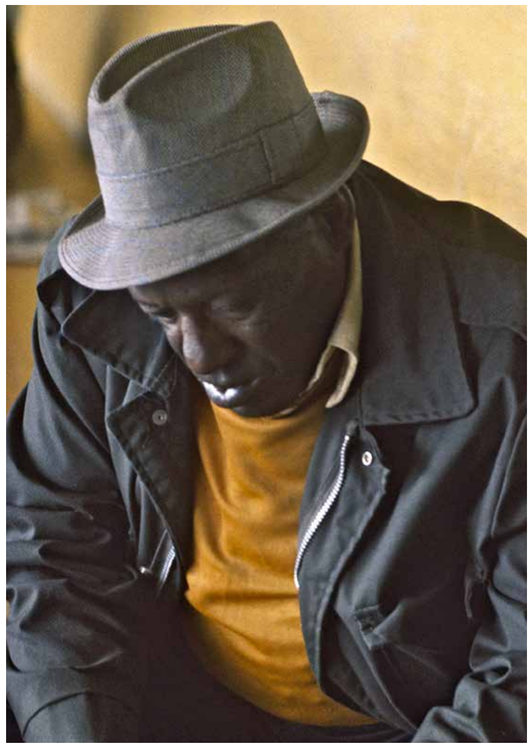
1973 - New Orleans

1975 - San Francisco

1974 - Raleigh, NC

1974 - Raleigh, NC

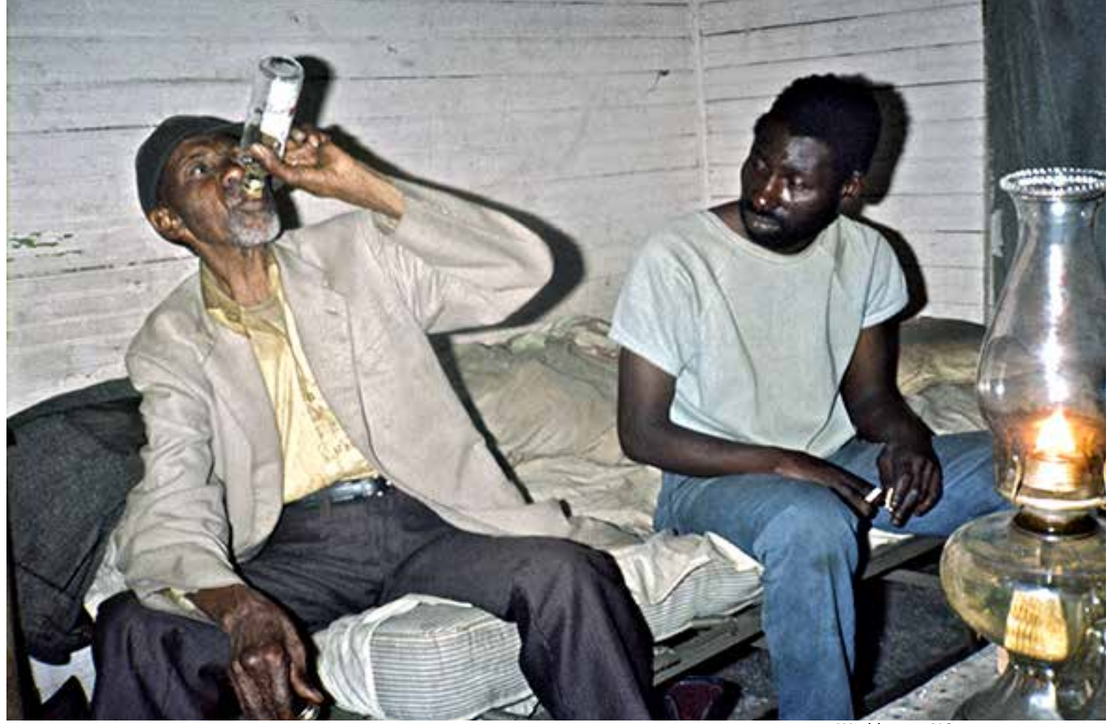
1975 - Seattle, WA



1975 - Seattle, WA

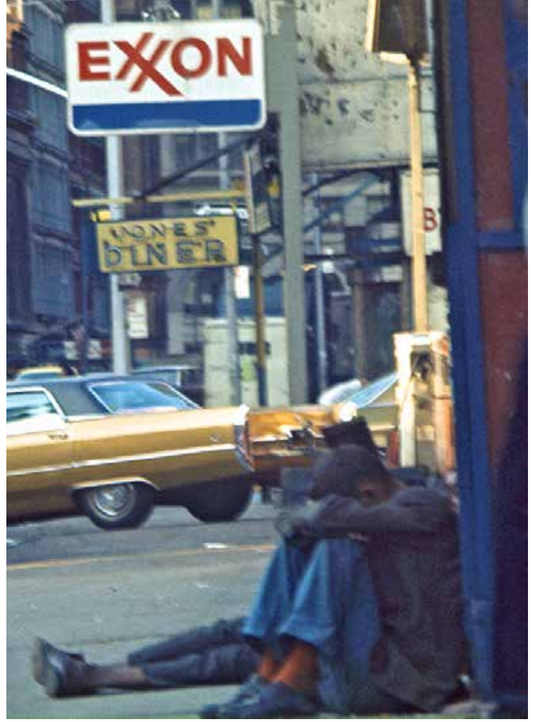
1974 - Raleigh, NC

Muligvis sort baggrund



1974 - Washington, NC - story on page 110

1974 - Buckhannon, WV - Jay Rockefeller



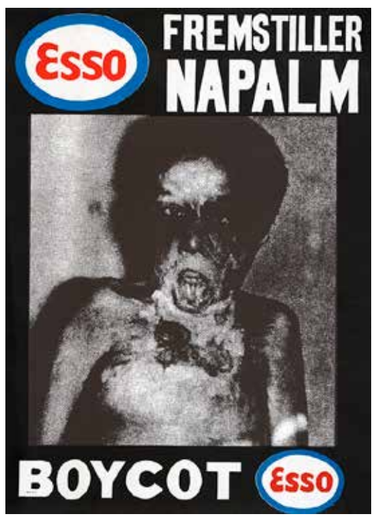
1971 - NYC

Hitch-hiking from freezing Prejudice to the warmth of Understanding

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

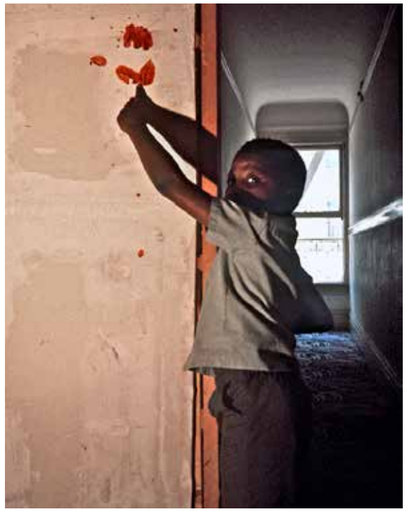
I'm often asked how I got to stay with the Rockefellers—and why. Here's my story. I left Washington, DC one spring morning in 1974 with the aim of seeing poor coal miners in West Virginia. Since it was warm, I took off in shirtsleeves, not knowing that spring comes three weeks later in the mountains. I soon found myself in a snowstorm at the intersection of Rt 50 and Interstate 79. Mountain people generally don't pick up hitchhikers—"even if it was my own son," insisted one man. But when drivers see someone in a snowstorm without so much as a windbreaker, they assume he's an escaped convict and zoom by without another thought. I stood there the entire day so cold that I couldn't even put out my frozen thumb. But the more I suffered, the more I felt that something fantastic would happen that day. As a vagabond I'd acquired an almost religious fatalism about suffering—that only through suffering can you enter heaven. Moreover, through that very conviction you're capable of melting the mountains, or cold hearts, around you. Finally, after dark, my sign identifying me as a Dane gave me a ride with two lawyers. Seeing my miserable condition, one said I could stay with him in Charleston for the night. So I was all set although staying with a labor attorney didn't sound quite like "heaven." Barely half an hour down the interstate, one of them said, "In there is Buckhannon, where Rockefeller lives..." and I immediately knew why I'd endured so much suffering that day. To their surprise I asked them to let me off there. Then I started the 13-mile walk down a dark deserted mountain road—still in a terrible snowstorm and still in shirtsleeves. In town I asked where Rockefeller lived. He was now president of West Virginia Wesleyan College and soon I found his house on Pocahontas St close to the school.

To explain this, I must briefly go back to my protests against the Vietnam War (before I came to America). Morally outraged by the US's use of napalm bombs, which incinerated or wounded thousands of Vietnamese—including children—I designed and printed a poster at my own expense; it read ESSO makes napalm. (Esso is today known as Exxon.) I ran around pasting them up all over Copenhagen, often with the police in hot pursuit. One cold December night, I climbed a tall tree to avoid being captured by the police, who, as I discovered, usually were also opposed to the Vietnam War. To toy with me, two smiling cops parked their car beside the tree. "You can sit up there all night and freeze while we relax in the warm car and drink coffee until you come down." Although I was freezing in my lofty haven, I was determined to win over my tormentors. I didn't come down and by morning they gave up. Every day I could see how I was winning my moral war. Esso, for example, had to hire a whole army of workers to go around and paint the Esso logo over with black paint to stop the spreading boycott of their gas stations. Thus, the power of advertising—this was my first advertisement—made me both hate and love the Esso logo. In the process I built up overwhelmingly hostile images of the monster behind Esso: the Rockefeller family. I also learned that they'd been responsible for the deaths of 51 striking men, women, and children in Colorado in 1914. With CIA help, they'd overthrown governments, including Iran's, and installed the murdering, torturing Shah to prevent Iran from nationalizing its oil wells (this later led to the Islamic Revolution). And so, experiencing déjà vu (my freezing night in a tree) and overcome with righteous anger, I felt I was entitled to face the monster himself—and knocked on the door.



1969 - My campaign to boycott ESSO

1974 - Valerie Rockefeller



Boy showing where his family member was killed - 1975 SF

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

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

And what happened? The same thing that always happens when I move in with the monsters in my head: A beautiful young woman opened the door. I assumed it was one of many servants and asked, in the most natural way—I had a right to be there after all—"May I see Mr. Rockefeller?" She said he wasn't home, but I could come in and wait for him. Although I myself looked like a monster of sorts (a snow monster), she probably thought I was a student from his university. She handed me towels to dry myself off and asked whether I was hungry. If I was, she'd start cooking since she didn't know when her "husband" be home. Husband? I thought. All the hateful caricatures I'd seen of "Rockefeller" had been of old men. Certainly this was the case after Nelson Rockefeller's massacre of prisoners in Attica, when they rioted to demand prison reform. I'd been at the funeral and knew some of the widowed black women (page 406). But Sharon Rockefeller, as she was called, was almost my age and her husband, Jay, only 10 years older. While she cooked for me, I started playing with her adorable 3-year-old daughter, Valerie. Seeing how well we got along, Sharon suggested that perhaps I could stay and take care of her; she was going to Europe in a few days and hadn't yet found a babysitter. A little later a family friend dropped by, and while we were chatting, she whispered that Valerie was named after Sharon's twin sister, who'd been murdered. "Murdered? How?" I asked in disbelief. I was used to murders in the underclass, not among the wealthy. After Sharon, whose maiden name is Percy, and Valerie had graduated from college, the family gathered in their lakefront mansion in a Chicago suburb. Sharon went to Valerie's bedroom to say goodnight to her sister, and the next morning her identical twin was found beaten and stabbed to death. The crime, which was never solved, left Sharon traumatized, and cast over the family a dark shadow that never dissipated. At the time, I wasn't surprised by Sharon's question about looking after her child as I was used to people trusting me immediately, but over the years I have often reflected on this remarkable woman. How many other women would, such a short time after a beloved sister had been murdered by an intruder, have the guts to invite into their homes a stranger who looked like Charles Manson? When Jay Rockefeller finally came home, I completely lost my heart to this warm-hearted family. Since I was immersed in conversation with his wife, he assumed I was a friend of hers and never asked why I was there (just as I myself had forgotten why I was there). If I'd expected to meet a monster, it was my own projection since to my surprise and joy we had the same opinions on almost everything. He was also opposed to the Vietnam War, later criticizing war hero John McCain for dropping napalm bombs on Vietnamese civilians. After college he'd traveled the same road as had I, working with poor coal miners who lived in shacks as miserable as the ones I'd photographed. Working to improve their conditions in the VISTA program, started by John F. Kennedy, he lost his heart to these miners, stayed there, and has been a powerful advocate for them ever since, first as their

1974 - Charleston, SC

Sharon Rockefeller with Valerie in 1974

governor, later as a senator in Washington. I felt right away that he was "my man." After we'd drunk quite a few bottles and he'd shown great interest in my photos of shacks and poverty, I felt so uplifted that I told him I had in vain tried to get support to buy a professional Nikon camera and film so I could complete my job. I'll never forget his answer: "Are you talking to me as a person or to the foundation? Well, come up to my office tomorrow and show me your grant proposal." I could hardly sleep that night. For the first time I had real hope of getting a little support for my photography (if only some babysitter money). But when I looked over the application I always carried with me, I saw a sentence about "the Rockefeller clan's brutal slaughter of 41 prisoners in Attica." I'd completely forgotten about it. I was so embarrassed after having met with so much warmth, hospitality, and trust from the Rockefellers that I couldn't bring myself to knock on his door. Instead, I turned around and continued my vagabonding with the slogan of the old Rockefeller: neither "a dime for the bank nor a penny to spend." Angry with myself for my prejudice, I phrased my new insight: The underclass syndrome of murder and alcoholism is just a mirror of the ruling class. Admittedly, the alcoholism part of it referred to what I'd seen in other upper-class families rather than to this family, who'd shown me, intruder though I was, so much generosity.

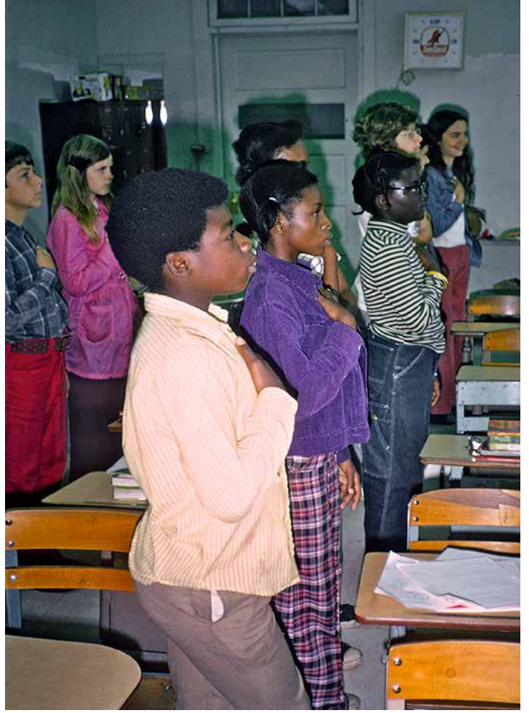
Two days later I stayed with this woman in a shack smack up against an Exxon refinery. Apart from my love/hate affair with the Exxon logo, I think there was another reason I ended up with her. During my first year in America, President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act to eliminate lead from gasoline. Leaded gasoline had been introduced by Standard Oil (Exxon) for its "anti-knock effect," and Exxon had fought previous attempts to outlaw it. Just before breaking my "anti-knock" vagabond principle in Jay and Sharon's house—I always waited passively for people to invite me home—I'd heard about new studies showing the destructive effects of lead on children. I thought of all the lead that black children were exposed to in ghetto homes, often build next to inner city highways. (Page 299). This gave me the answer to why violence and murder had exploded about 20 years after leaded gas became common. (This boy is showing me the blood from someone in his family who'd just been murdered.) Lead also plays an important role in the learning disabilities of many ghetto children and explains why many whites, like Valerie, did better in school.

17 years later, after one of my shows in Stanford, a white woman came up to me and asked whether we could talk in private. She seemed a bit angry when she said, "I'm in your book." I was totally confused since there were hardly any whites in the book. When she found the page, I realized she was Valerie Rockefeller. "Last year," she continued, "when my roommate came home after your show and told me you portrayed my father as an alcoholic and mass murderer, I was very angry with you. But now that I've seen the show myself, I have to give you a big hug. And here's my business card. If ever you need my help, just call me." Wow. Again I was struck by guilt because I hadn't sufficiently distinguished in the book and show between Exxon, a symbol of oppression, and the loving family who'd once taken me in. I encountered exactly the same overwhelming reaction from three other Rockefeller children at other universities. They even asked for my advice on how they could best serve the poor.

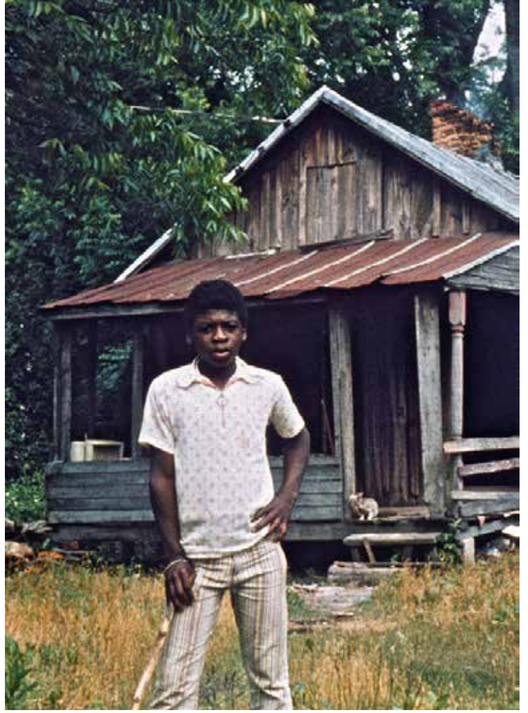
So I wasn't surprised to see Valerie, whose weighty baggage was both negative and positive, end up as a special education teacher for adolescents with learning and emotional disabilities in East Harlem. Somehow I saw a direct line going from our first meeting in her house when she was a child to her social commitment as an adult in Harlem. First and foremost, she was molded by the long social commitment of her parents. In parallel with black children's inherited trauma, I wondered if she also inherited some of her mother's, but haven't asked her. In any case I was, as with her father, astonished by how much we agreed on everything when we communicated in 2015. "I'm still hypercritically judgmental of people with money!" she wrote to me. She's also part of the Rockefeller family's effort to stop Exxon/Mobil's climate denial. "As descendants, we have an extra burden to fight climate change," Valerie says.

1974 - Washington, NC

1974 - Washington, NC



1974 - Washington, NC. Robert in school



1974 - Washington, NC. Robert at home

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

1973 - Tunica, LA

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

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

The integration of black and white school children was one of the most significant results of the civil rights struggle. That many better-off liberals didn't allow their children to integrate helped sabotage integration and create resentment among poor whites, who couldn't afford private schools. Seeing the conditions of American schools was perhaps the most shocking aspect of my journey. Never had I heard so many brainwashing phrases, such as "Men treasure freedom above all else," combined with an almost total omission of black history. Today, some schools even ban books by black authors, such as Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, or simply about "critical thinking."

This totalitarian uniformity, in place of teaching children how to think independently and critically, is the equivalent of the "Pledge of Allegiance" to "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Like the pledge, it stands in glaring contrast to the state of slavery being imposed on black children in these dilapidated, plywood-windowed "ghetto schools." In theory we gladly grant freedom and justice to Robert, seen here pledging allegiance in Washington, NC, to walk home after school to his shack, with more rats than books. At least covering the windows with the stars-and-stripes helps keep the cold—and the American Dream—out.

1974 - Washington, NC

1972 - Canarsie, NY

1972 - NYC

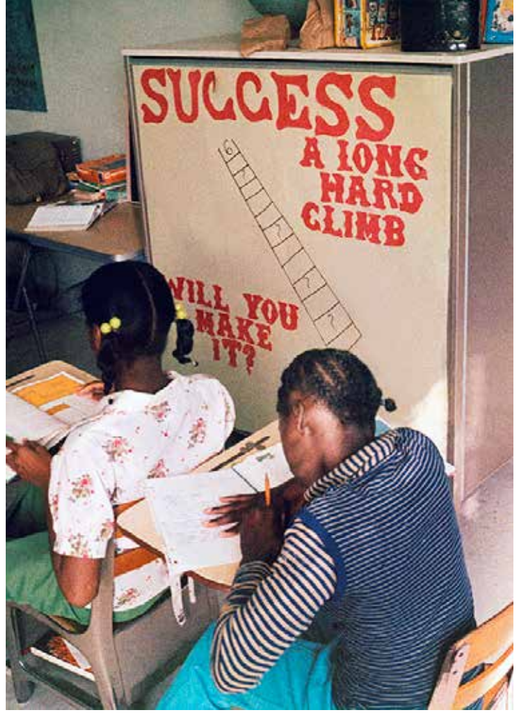
1973 - Louisville, KY

1972 - Canarsie, NY

1974 - South Boston

1972 - Canarsie, NY

1974 - South Boston



1974 - Washington, NC

White flight's violence against black children

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

I saw violent struggles in cities around the country where blacks, trying to break out of their enforced segregation and give their children a chance at an equal education, were being bussed to schools in white neighborhoods. When police and soldiers have to escort children on every bus and furious stone-throwing whites have to be kept behind barricades to protect black children, we teach them on their first day in the white world that the Ku Klux Klan is at the heart of every white ... as I erroneously wrote back then. In my work with the KKK since then, I learned that the children of the KKK are often the only whites in all-black schools since they're too poor to move away from black neighborhoods.

"Black schools" is the phrase many Danish parents use to refer to schools whose students are mostly brown immigrants and which they themselves are now fleeing. This is the generation that, as self-righteous youths in the '70s, condemned American racism when they saw my slideshow.

1974 - San Francisco

1971 - East St Louis, IL

1989 - Harlem, NY

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

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

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

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

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

When they're constantly told that they don't belong, it's not surprising that many ghetto parents are opposed to integrated schooling despite their knowledge that ghetto schools don't work. Being deprived of a good education in your own ghetto school is preferable to the illusion of belonging to mainstream society with the deprivation you also must suffer here. It's a sad fact that even in integrated schools we kill the spirit and motivation of the children we've marginalized. Everywhere in the world teachers are creating pupils to fit the image and expectations they already have of them. If you take a random sample of a class and tell the teachers that these pupils are "potential academic spurters," these kids will, after a year or two, live up to that expectation thanks to the special treatment the teacher unconsciously devotes to them. In a master-slave society, the one expected to become the slave (useless) will thus be given an inferior education, with black or white teachers, segregation or integration making no great difference.

This "innocent" discrimination has disastrous consequences wherever we divide up pupils into "slow" and "bright" tracks, which are naturally a reflection of class society outside. Just how damaging such discrimination is to a child's self-esteem was shown when a computer mistakenly put all the so-called "slow" children into the "bright" class and vice versa. A year later, when the mistake was discovered, educators found that the slow pupils were behaving as though they were bright and the bright pupils were behaving as though they were stupid—the beginning of ghettoization. I constantly met teachers and even principals who referred to their ghetto pupils as "animals." To the point where I saw even young children thinking of themselves as rats.

In my own school in Denmark, I learned firsthand that the image the teacher has of a child becomes the image the child tries to live up to. I spoke a rural dialect that sounded "dumb" and "inarticulate" to teachers in the city, where they spoke "correct" Danish. As a result, they unconsciously avoided me, and little by little I became introverted, with occasional explosions of "dumb" behavior. I lost all desire for learning and consistently scored 30% to 50% lower than the other pupils. Finally, I was forced to drop out, which eventually made me into a streetwise vagabond. Had I, in addition to my ADHD, been black or brown in a racist society, where we unconsciously try to keep such "unteachables" out of sight till they became "behavioral untouchables," I could easily have ended up not only "streetwise," but also a "criminal," "addict," "prostitute," "welfare loafer" or filled any of the other roles a society of disposable humans finds it fitting to mold its undesirables into.

Above interview with school children - illustrated

1974 - Washington, NC

Breaking the Stereotypes: Empowering Black and Minority Children Through Education

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

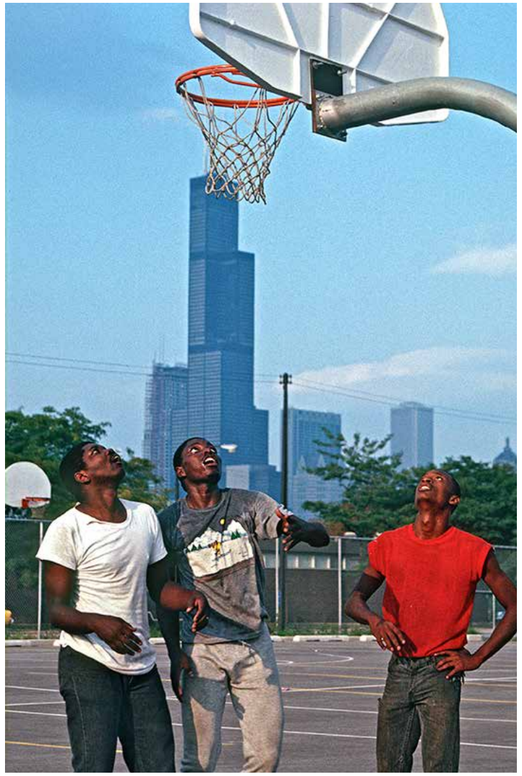
To avoid the accusation of being the master-slave society's whip-hand, teachers often find new ways of putting the blame on their pupils. Liberals insist the ghetto child's "lack of motivation" and "impaired learning ability" are due to their being "culturally deprived" since they come from homes where there are no books, except maybe the Bible or the Qur'an. Could it be that the teachers themselves are trapped in a closed system and have become excellent oppressors with their "Our schools aren't bad, but we get bad students" or their condescending "Poor little things" judgments, which crush children?

If there's any doubt left, it's worth remembering that highly motivated, politically and socially aware teachers in schools run by the Black Panthers and black Muslims brought their ghetto kids up to national (white) standards. Private Muslim schools in Denmark can do it in the same way. In other words, by excelling academically, not solely through athletic scholarships.
Such preventive, expectancy-based learning can also be seen in societies steeped in oppressive thinking directed at other vulnerable groups.
American women, for example, who attended girls' schools, where they're protected from society's sexism, do better after graduating than women who went to integrated schools.

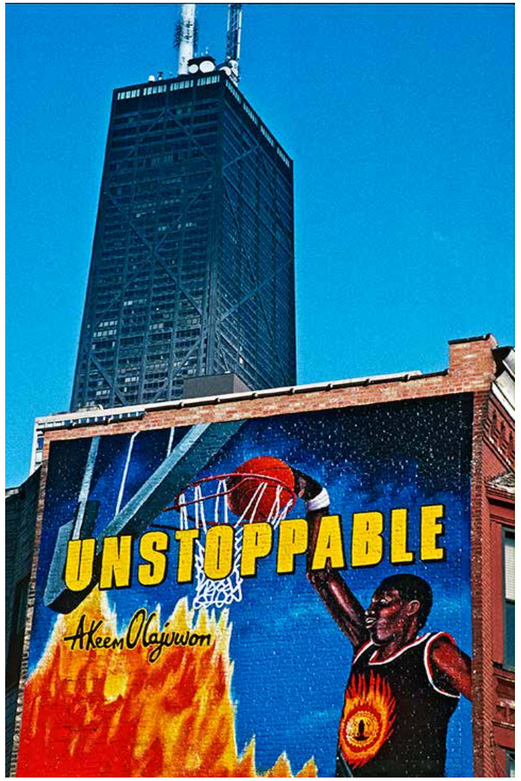
If some of us find it difficult facing our own racism, let's not forget how few men 50 years ago saw themselves as sexists.
Yet the fact that we crushed girls with our attitudes is revealed by the statistics from those years, which show how many women we "forced" away from higher education with emotional blocks that prevented them from becoming doctors, lawyers, and scientists.

When we see the same "4th grade syndrome"—4th grade is when marginalized black and brown children in the US and Europe typically start falling behind—we have to conclude:

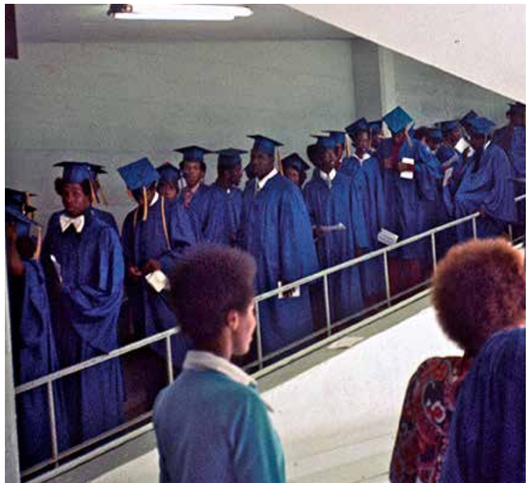
Either we need help processing our racism, or children of color must be protected from us in non-integrated schools with highly committed and conscientious teachers, "saving angels" who can restore the sense of self-worth and identity that we so early on steal from them.
Unfortunately, I find myself an active part of this racism. After months of teaching in mostly white universities, for example, I've internalized the students' thinking. I frequently catch myself thinking in racist terms about "blacks"—at least until I decide it is time for de-brainwashing and I move back in with my black friends in the ghettos. When I'm similarly isolated in Denmark, my thinking about those whom Danes label "Muslims" becomes skewed in the same way. With the racist's reproachful and distancing perspective as well as his penchant for finding fault with "the other," I thus help our outcasts form a defeatist hostile attitude—again, in the blindness of my white privilege. For blindness it is when we outwardly demand integration, but in our inner thinking "distance ourselves from," fear, and consequently crush those we should integrate with.



1990 - Chicago

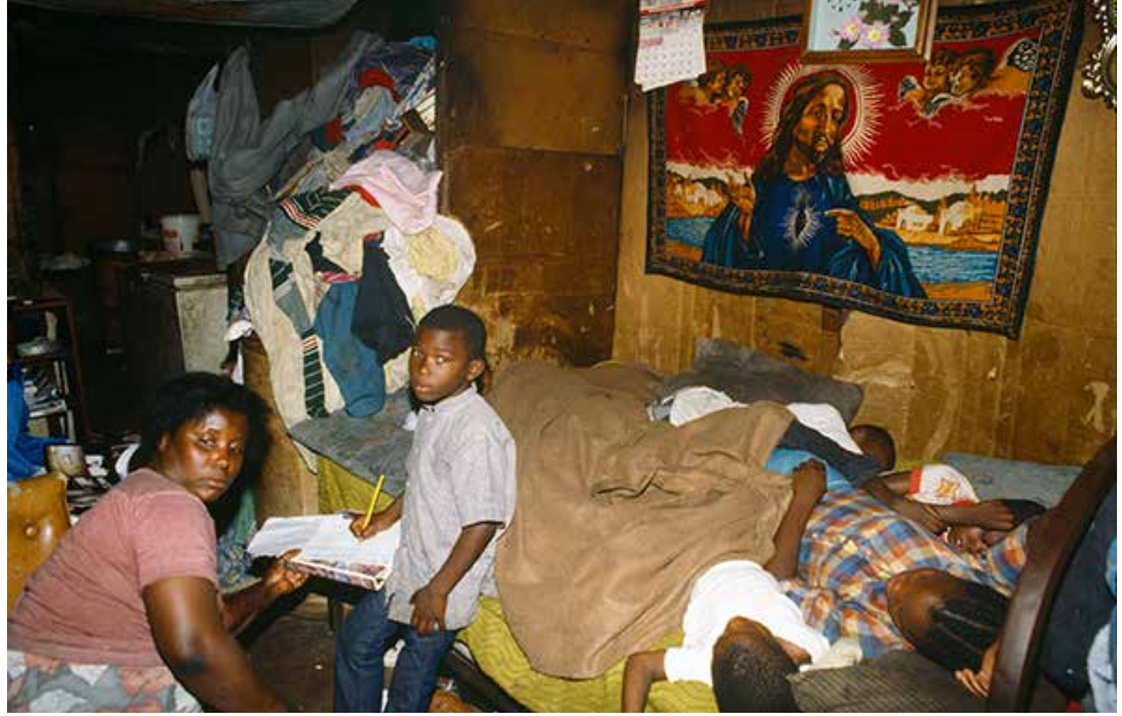


1990 - Chicago



1989 - NYC

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



1990 - Burke County, GA

2009 - From high school prom in Natchez, MS

Bridging Divides: Racial Solidarity or the Persistence of Apartheid

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

In Los Angeles I saw a beautiful case of racial solidarity when West Indian immigrant students formed an organization to motivate native blacks not to drop out of high school and college—a sort of historical repetition of the underground railroad, where free blacks helped people out of slavery.

Whites who form racist notions of black ability when they see blacks falling behind in grades, in both segregated and integrated schools, forget that this is the same oppressive mindset that has been internalized by blacks generation after generation—to such an extent that black parents, whose own self-esteem has been destroyed by a white-majority society, have been unable to give their children a greater hope of success.

West Indian blacks, on the other hand, who grew up in black-majority countries, were better able to overcome this oppressive thinking. Up to 85% of my black students at Ivy League universities told me that they were of West Indian descent or had one parent who was West Indian or had been adopted by white parents.

The extent to which we're all victims of this oppression is shown in this picture of a group of black teenagers. The girl was adopted as a baby by blacks in the ghetto and has been brought up to be black: to behave black, to think black, and to dress black. She has hardly anything in common with whites; she can't even speak "our language". In white homes I see the opposite. Black and white, Palestinian and Jew, native and immigrant, male and female, heterosexual and gay suffer severe injury when parents early on recreate the patterns of oppression they themselves received from their parents.

1973 - Baltimore

Both parties are eventually robbed of the ability, as well as the desire, to treat the other side humanely. We give up deep down, deciding it's an absurd ethnic alchemy to try to integrate elements that repel each other like oil and water. The frantic efforts of liberals to shake these two elements so much that they fragment into smaller particles for a short time is just a futile attempt to give oppression a human face—like voting for Obama while trapped in the massive apartheid of the heart Obama describes in The Courage to Hope. In overturning affirmative action, the conservative Supreme Court finally abandoned the attempt to place a majority of blacks at the educational levels at which they naturally would have arrived had they lived in a free society without our prior oppression. So is there any hope?

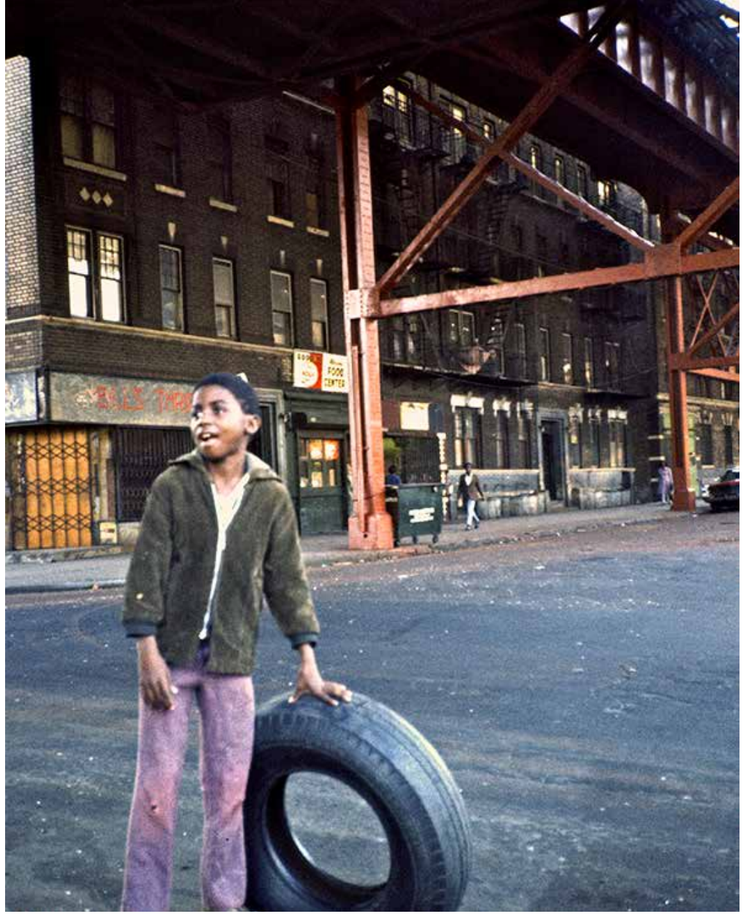
1973 - Indianapolis, IN

Love's guilt of sin among white students

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

Yes, I often hear even the worst racists say, "I wish we could adopt all black children so they could become like us." Although in typical racist fashion they look for the fault in the minority's behavior, it is not an expression of racial hatred.
Just as Europeans are often encouraged when Muslims convert to Christianity, forgetting that it is the different culture of these brown people to which they react negatively. I see this awkward hope most clearly in white students in American universities when they relate how, out of liberal guilt, they try to reach out to black students. But all the time they're held back by reactionary guilt: they recall all the warnings of their parents in childhood; usually not verbally, but in their eyes or in the clicks of the car door locks when they drove too close to a black neighborhood.

It's frightening to betray the love of our parents, whom we can feel in the back of our minds pulling the opposite way. So when they try to reach out to blacks out of love, they are pulled backward out of love. They become clumsy and patronizing toward blacks, who react with deep-rooted anger and hostility since they've gone through a similar, but reverse oppression. This revives the white fear—now the fear of being rejected. Thus, the oppressor and the oppressed constantly "create" each other since none of us is free. For what defines all systems of oppression is the loss of "freedom"—the freedom to react in a way that someone completely outside the system (if it such were possible) would see as "normal" or "human." This cocktail of white guilt and fear creates the anger and hostility of internalized racism among blacks, which in turn creates more white fear and guilt, etc.



1974 - Brownsville, NY

1974 - Palm Beach, FL

1975 - San Francisco

The worst racism today is thus not created by hate, but in the name of love—in the desire to protect our children from what we ourselves were taught to fear. When I take whites to black parties in the US or to brown parties in Denmark, I often see them burst into tears of guilt: after having for so long unconsciously demonized them, they suddenly experience "the others" as real human beings.
Our tears reveal that we're all victims of caste-ism.

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

1982 - San Francisco

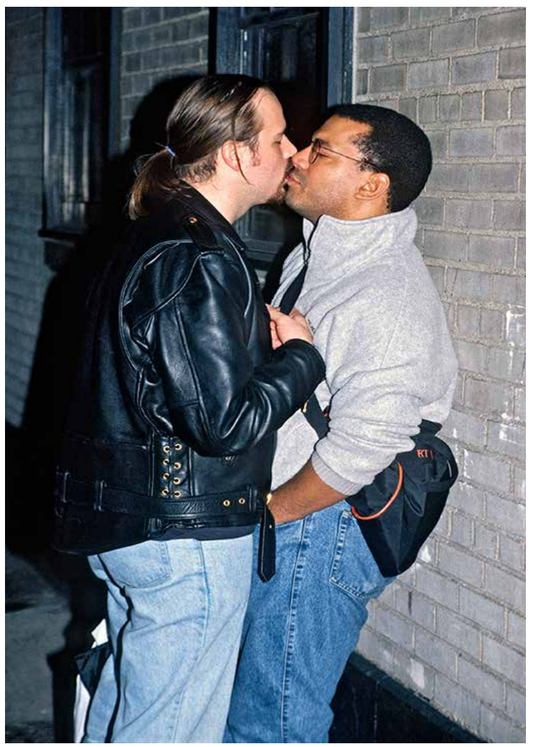
Intersecting Oppressions: Our Dual Fight Against Racism and Homophobia

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

The more I learned about the crippling and self-perpetuating effect of being ostracized, the harder it was for me to condemn whites for our racism. Even for me, and African and Caribbean immigrants, who were not molded by our master-culture, it was not always possible to respond in a human way towards those who are trapped in a pariah culture. The clumsy behavior of whites towards blacks in the US, became especially understandable when I compared it to my own difficulties in being fully human towards those locked up in the homosexual ghetto by my heterosexual society.
My attitude toward homosexuals had been basically "liberal." Although I had subconsciously forced them as effectively underground in my rural Danish childhood as they are in Saudi Arabia, I had not been shaped by overtly hateful attitudes towards them. Thus, I did not have to meet many self-hating gays in the closet on the American highways to realize that I felt it as a moral duty for me to become active in the world's first open gay movement in San Francisco. There I soon learned from more "liberated" gays that liberals throughout history were true liberation's most insidious enemy. Our deep sense of heterosexual superiority remained untouched by our concern for the "plight" of gay people. We appeared to concede so much with our condescending "we must accept homosexuals" while the liberal "we" invariably excluded the very minority whose integration was being urged. Much has changed since, but in many countries the oppressed are still left to struggle not only against genuinely expressed bigotry and hatred, but also "sympathy" and "understanding" – "tolerance" extended to something regrettable rather than normal.

When for centuries gays and lesbians have been prevented from kissing and holding hands openly, without fear; when laws have been enacted in most states to make homosexuality abhorrent to them, before they reach adulthood, so that they adopt and internalize the heterosexual definition of good and evil; and when gays and lesbians are forced to make painful, futile attempts to straighten their lives, especially when young, it has the same debilitating effect on their self-image as when blacks straightened their hair to "pass" or even survive—eventually we will have forced them into segregated ghettos similar to those of blacks, complete with riots and subcultures. Being an early advocate for gays was noticed, and it was black gays, such as San Francisco International Film Festival director Albert Johnson and theater director Burial Clay (murdered a week after setting up my show), who were the first to invite American Pictures to America. When I lived with black gay activist Lawrence Andrews, who helped me set up my American Pictures Theater in San Francisco, he invited me to lead workshops for his group, "Black and white men together," to help combat the racism he saw among the members. "The whites can go to bed with us," he pointed out, "but afterwards want nothing to do with us." The split between gays and lesbians was even greater then, but in the '80s I saw lesbians come out of their justified anger at men to unite with our movement.

1989 - Washington, DC



1992 - NYC

1984 - Swarthmore, PA

2012 - Washington, DC

1973 - Baltimore. Ms. Willie after our Thanksgiving dinner

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

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

1973 - Baltimore. Ms. Willie in her living room

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

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

Hitchhiking with my Danish sign in Baltimore's ghetto on Thanksgiving night, 1973, and hoping to find a place to stay, I was astonished to be picked up by a beautiful black woman, as black women never picked me up. She invited me to her neatly polished suburban home and having read Danish literature, we got involved in a deep intellectual conversation after which she invited me to share her silk bed upstairs. Not until she started kissing me did her beard stubble tell me she was not a woman. When I later told the story to American men they would usually burst out with nausea: "What did you do? Jump out the window?" Indeed, soon afterward two men, believing they had picked up a female prostitute, killed such a transsexual.

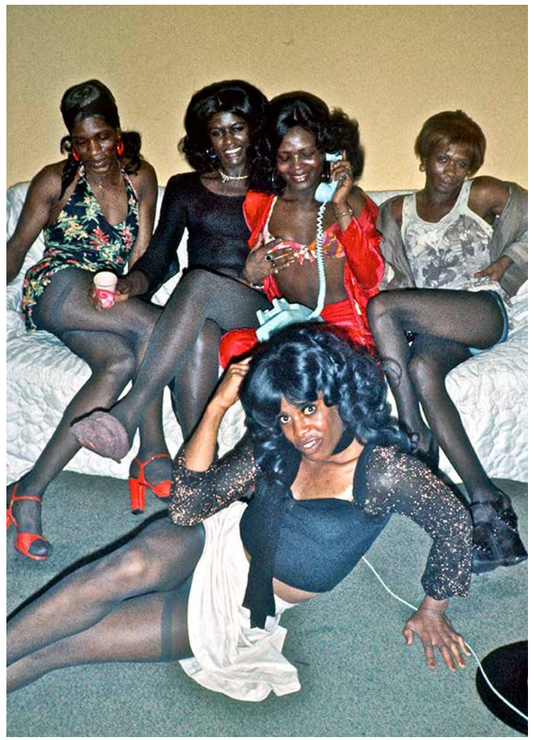
For me Ms. Willie instead became a dear friend, who introduced me to the world of transgenders. He admired Denmark for first allowing sex-change operations and told me about Christine Jorgensen's book about it. I was amazed hearing how Willie growing up in the tobacco fields in North Carolina had felt attracted to female clothes since she was 5, but since escaped north to better live out her real identity. How times have changed is be seen by how she today – now age 72 – has moved back to her roots in North Carolina.

After Willie's loving introduction to the special trans- and drag world, I felt completely at home when I later moved into a building full of transgenders in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. Especially since I experienced many of their identity problems during their transitions, I loved their joy-filled parties and drag show competitions. So when in old age I opened Denmark's first female mosque, I did it on the condition that our many LGBTQ-refugees could wear high-heeled shoes in the mosque for their drag shows.

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

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

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1975 - Tenderloin, SF. - Transsexual party

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

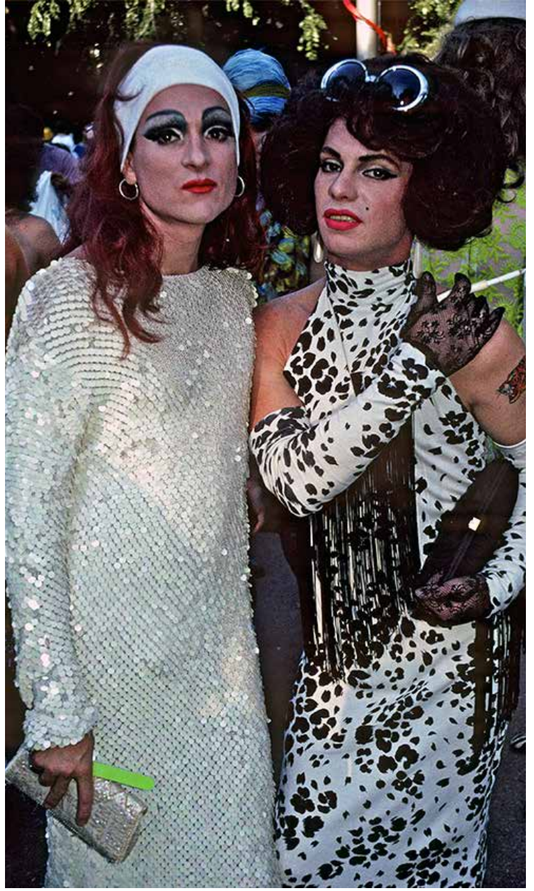
The Ghetto of the Ghetto: How Society Marginalizes and Stigmatizes Transgenders

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

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

For liberation was not easy. I saw early on how the outside oppression drove many transgenders into drugs and prostitution, thus mirroring the most obvious end result of black oppression. So most of my friends I lost touch with. When a social system treats a minority with contempt and hostility, in the end those within this ghetto become so conscious of its closed system that they go one further and exaggerate their perceived "difference."

And so the vicious circle of oppression is completed as the sub-culture now visibly seems to "justify" society's contempt for it. In this way the "ghetto of the ghetto" is created as the "nice", conformist gays and lesbians often feel that the drag, transsexual, and other special LGBTQ sub-cultures spoil it for them in their relationship to the straight world. The hatred of transgender people was a key factor behind Trump's election victory in 2024.



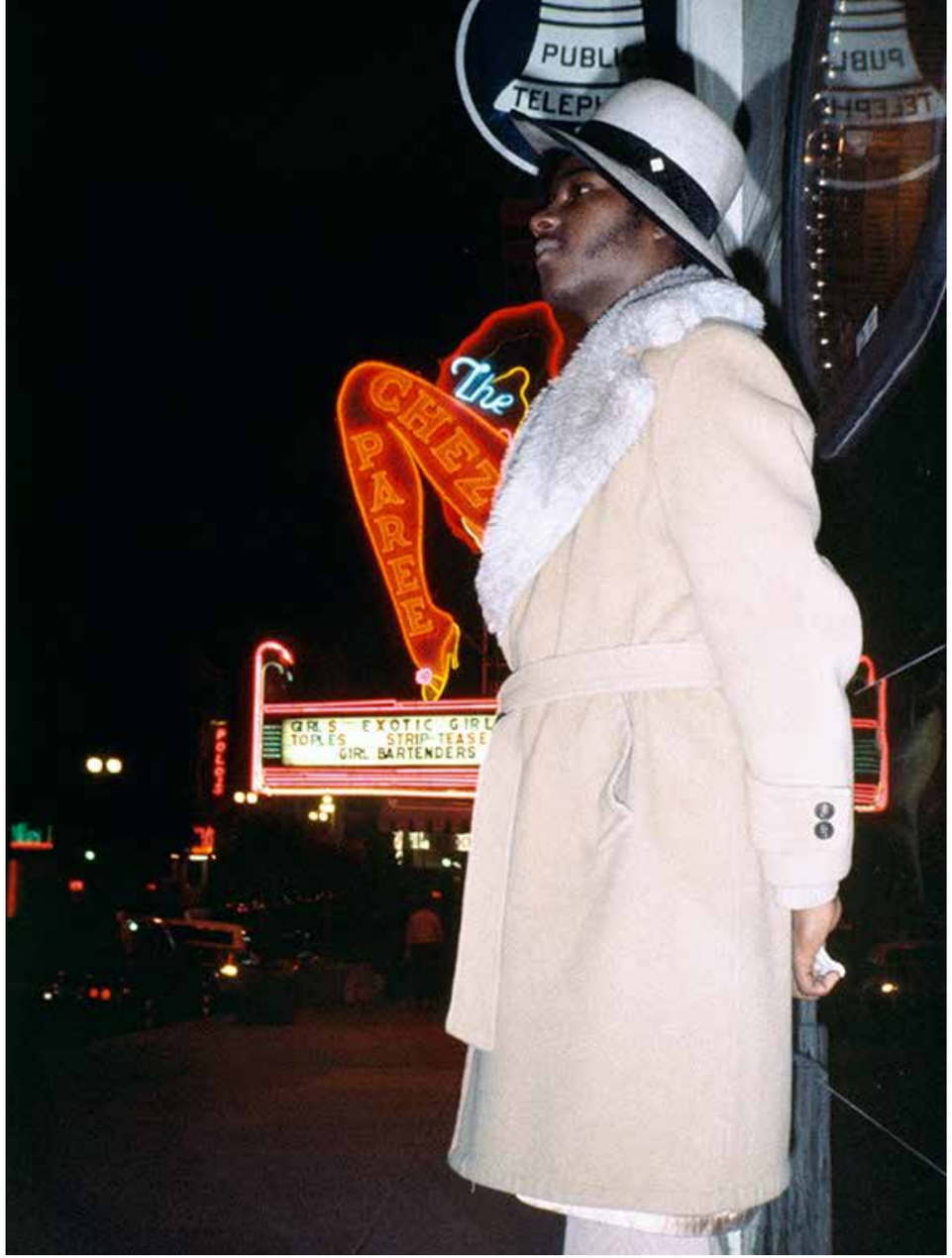
2001 - NYC

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

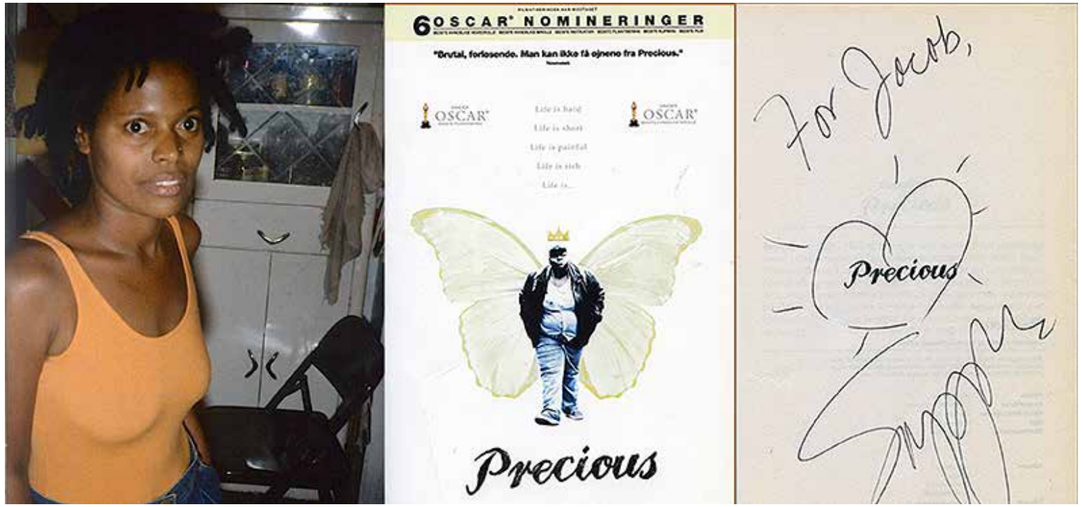
1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

Muligvis sort baggrund



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

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

2012 - Sapphire at a dinner with me in New York

2016 - Working with incest survivors in Denmark

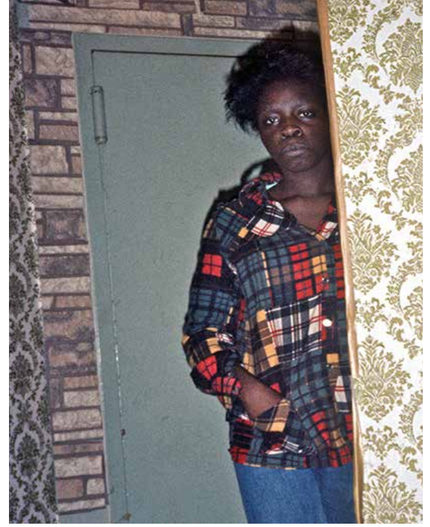
"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." — Zora Neale Hurston, from Their Eyes Were Watching God

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

In a way, I had already joined forces with unwitting closet lesbians as a vagabond, when I was often invited home by women who complained about the sexually aggressive American men they dared not date. In the 1980s I saw many of these come out of the closet and in universities lesbians became the second largest minority (after Jews) to organize my lectures.

There was one LGBT person in particular with whom I formed a strong bond – to the envy of the two lesbian filmmakers who were my homebase in New York as a lecturer. For they were big admirers of Sapphire, who was already known as a feminist slam poet and activist in United Lesbians of Color for Change. Sapphire and I became so infatuated with each other's ideas that I often lived with her in Harlem – on and off between lectures.
What bound us together was that, as 'outsiders', we had developed completely the same ideas about oppression, especially about childhood sexual abuse as the root cause of so much oppression. I told her about all the incest that white people were beginning to reveal in my workshops, and she told me what she had observed in the black community. So I was not surprised when she suddenly became world famous with her best-selling novel 'Push' and the Oscar-winning movie 'Precious'. In Denmark, I proudly introduced the movie in the cinemas with a slide show about "my life with Sapphire."
Since then, Sapphire has come to Denmark to support transformation workshops in the Ubuntu House for incest survivors.

1973 - Sally in Queens, NY



2006 - Sally in Bronx, NY

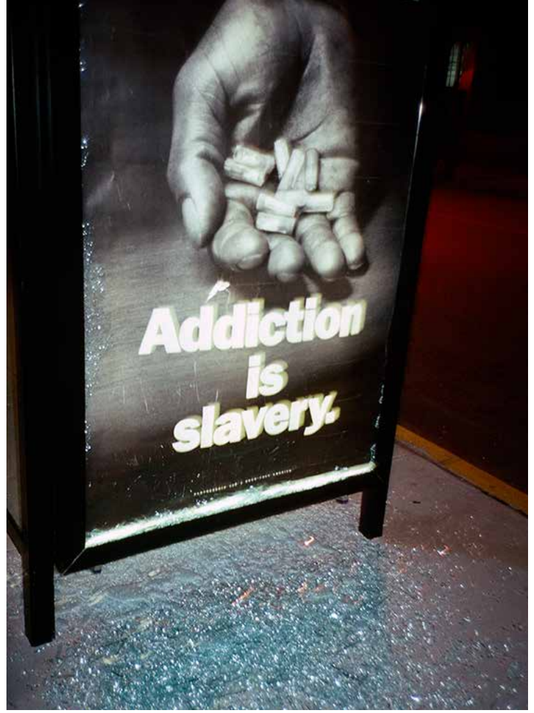
"I know that I can never go back to my childhood, but in its absence, I have learned to live with the ghosts that haunt me." -Sexual abuse survivor Maya Angelou

The urgent need for help is illustrated by the fact that 19.7 per cent of girls and 9.7 per cent of boys worldwide have been sexually abused in childhood. In the US, the figures are 25 per cent and 16 per cent respectively, or 42 million adult incest survivors. But since it's twice as high among black Americans, three times as high among the poor, and ten times as high for children of single mothers, it also underlies much of the violence around us (from white-hate terror to black crime).
Had I not stayed in touch with so many of the people who invited me into their lives as an outsider (as well as a vagabond), I would've been blind to how many of these invitations were actually cries for help—usually verbalized in irrational, self-destructive or violent ways. It is one thing to feel the deeper pain in others, but I could not put words to it myself until the victims themselves started to do so – not least in my workshops. Often, extremely overweight women like "Precious" would talk about how they had numbed their pain with alcohol, drugs and compulsory overeating.
One man in West Virginia wrote me a check for $5000. "Why?" I asked. "I sued my pedophile abuser for a large sum of money, and now I want to support your healing workshops." I never cashed the check.
Among my ghetto friends, I also saw over the years how sexual abuse affected children differently within the same family. I wondered why Sally, 18 years old in 1973 (on page 324) when her mother always turned a blind eye), stopped coming to the family events in the 80s and 90s. When I lived with Sally in 2006, now as big as Precious, she opened up to me about how her father's constant rape of her had ruined her life so that she could never have a boyfriend. In the years before, I had seen her sister, Kashia, become such a criminal junkie that I had to keep an eye on all the film equipment when I had PBS with me in 1986. In another film in 2015, I counseled the other sister, Cory, on how her life had been ruined. All three sisters have since depathologized their PTSD with outside help and are now, yes, survivors.

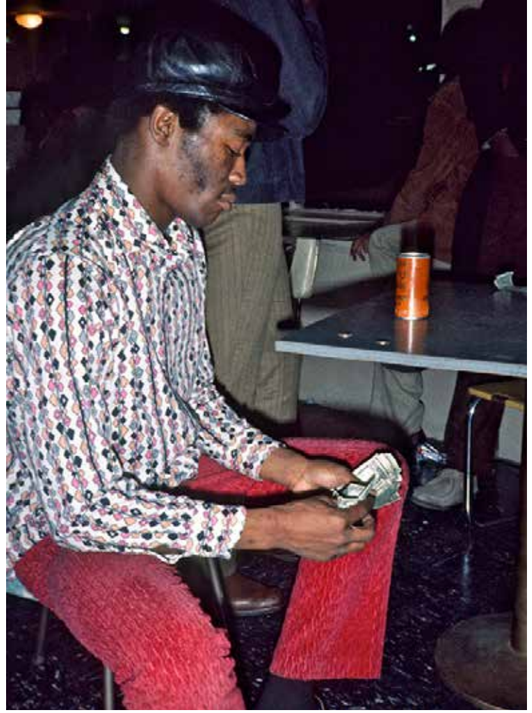
1986- Kashia as a crack addict in Queens, NY

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

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



1991 - NYC



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

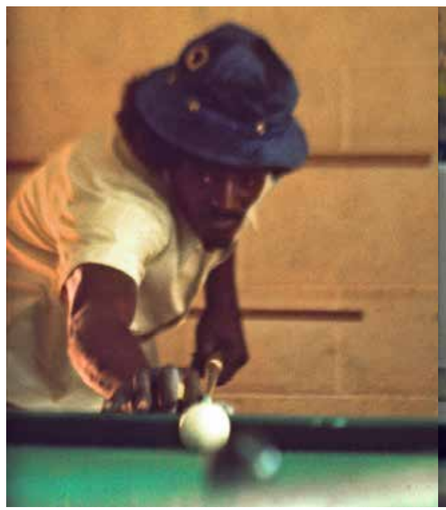
1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

Facing Ourselves in the Mirror of Ghetto Subcultures

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

A strong subculture in the black ghetto is a thorn in the side of better-off blacks. Both try to make themselves "deserving" of integration, but whites make it that much more difficult by stereotyping them according to a pathologically negative image of ghetto subculture. Sensitive to this phenomenon, the upper ghetto tends to view the lower ghetto as something to be ashamed of rather than as proof of their common oppression.

So strong are tensions between the upper and the lower ghetto that I often had to choose sides, which wasn't difficult after all I'd seen of the suffering in the lower ghetto and the contempt from both the upper ghetto and whites. The more I began to understand the lower ghetto, the more I understood the dynamics of oppression in our system. For many whites the lower ghetto is an incomprehensible world of criminals, pimps, gang members, traffickers, prostitutes, and addicts. Since the ghetto is a closed system, their acts are desperate and disclose a pattern of absolute contempt for the rest of society, which they know they'll never become a part of.



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1973 - Greensboro, NC

Pool halls are their meeting place, luxury cars their status symbol, black/brown nationalism or Islamism their inflammatory community and identity, the brotherly handshake and the sophisticated "jive" or "walla" talk their communication. "Backstabbing" may be as common as the brotherly handshake, but once you learn their rules and a certain technique of survival, you can't help but love these social outcasts more than any other social group. I have always found it more overwhelming and uplifting to encounter humanity in a brutal environment than to find it among people sheltered from the pain of life.

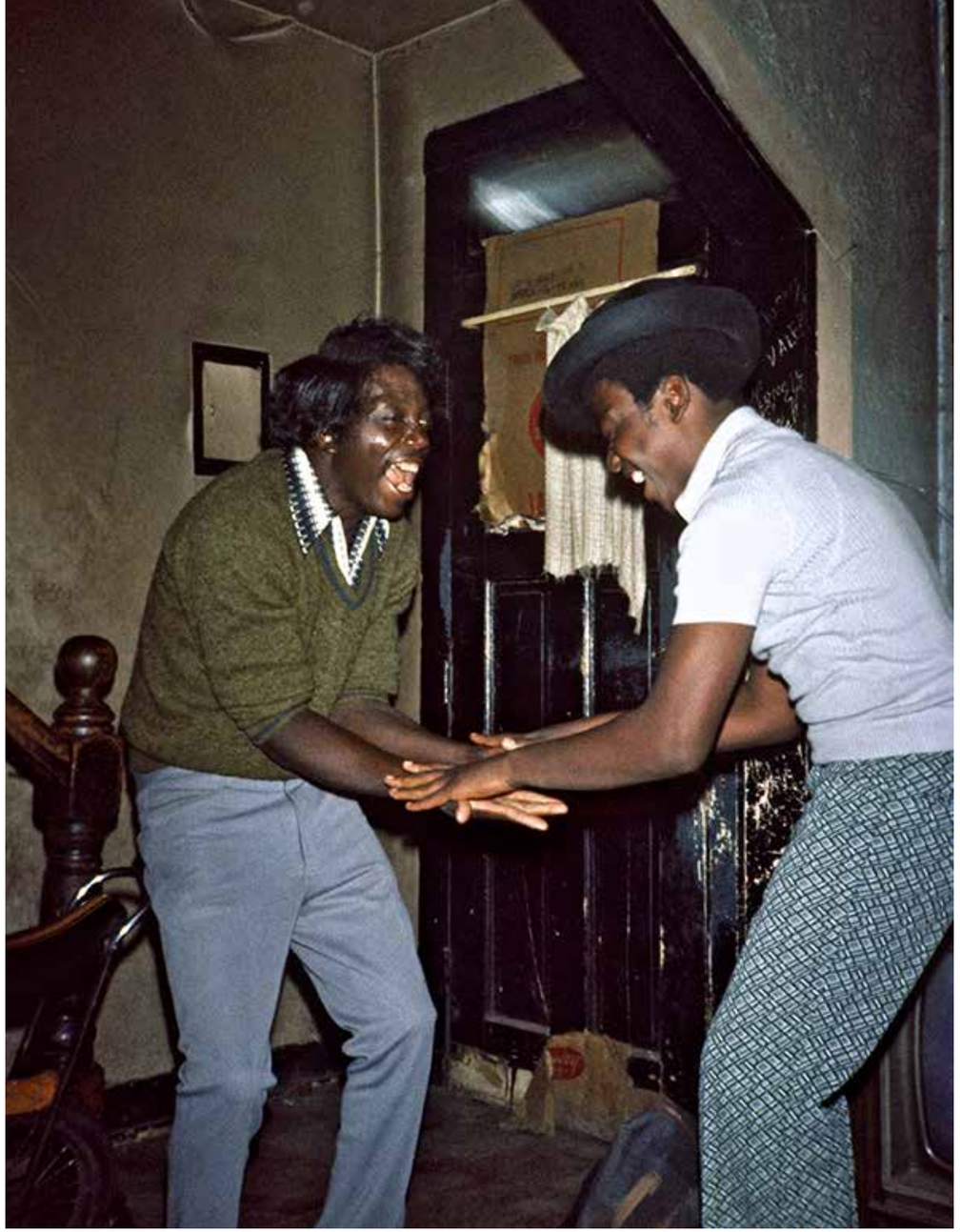
When this ghetto underworld provokes us, it's not least because it constitutes an enormously exaggerated mirror image of ourselves. Without understanding and respecting this frightening culture, we're incapable of acknowledging the oppressive and violent aspects of ourselves, which we see reflected in the uncomfortable images shown here. For they do not show a "black" or "brown" culture, but rather our own state of mind in all its present brutality.

Here are all the tendencies of our system stripped down to a ghastly parody: the competitive spirit, the race for status symbols, sexism, and (not least) the master-slave relationship.

1974 - Daytona Beach, FL

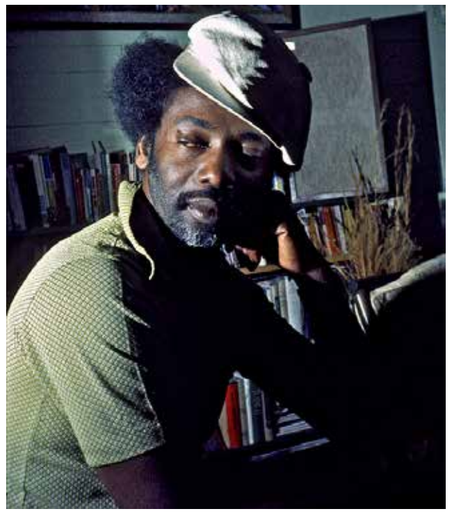
1972 - Detroit

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

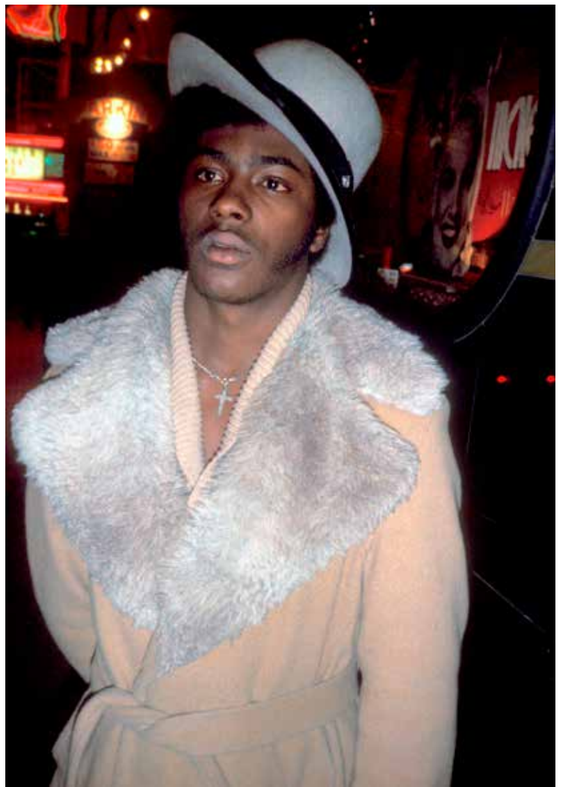


1975 - Richmond, VA

Muligvis sort baggrund



1973 - Zebulon, NC - Below both 1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco 1974 - NYC



The unseen chains of exploitation and dependency in the ghetto

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

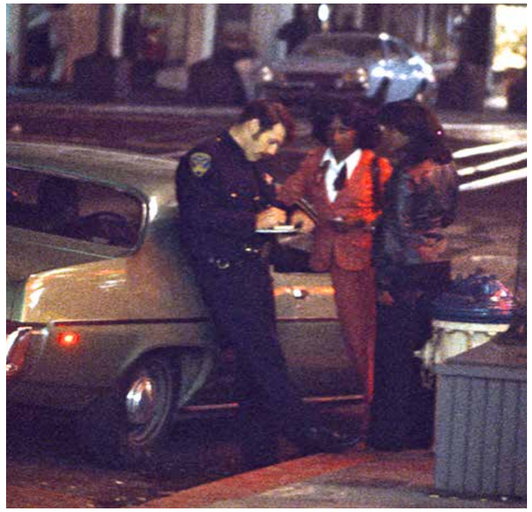
"Many women who are trapped in exploitative situations have internalized the belief that they deserve to be treated badly. This is a form of self-hatred that is nurtured by a society that devalues and degrades women." — bell hooks

Wherever in the world the master-slave relationship exists, there will be, within the slave culture, further divisions into new master-slave relationships. Where any such relationship exists between people, you'll know that these people aren't free since a master-slave relationship can exist only in a closed system. In the underclass such slavery is seen most clearly in the relationship between pimp and prostitute. The black prostitute is totally subjugated by the pimp and cringes mentally at his feet in deep veneration. The pimp, however, is not only executioner, but also a victim in the greater system, in which he becomes the new slave driver who sees to it that the merchandise is delivered to the slave master, the white man. His tool is no longer the whip but the pimp stick made from twisted coat hangers. Even though pimps, like businesspeople in the larger society, can behave quite inhumanly, it's important to remember that they, like capitalists, do business according to well-defined rules and laws beyond their control. These laws are laid down in The Book, an unwritten Adam Smith or business manual that's been passed down from pimp to pimp for generations and which can be seen almost as an extension of capitalist treatises since it describes the under-system in the larger economic system. Woe to the pimp who doesn't follow the regulations! Just like the larger capitalists, they have their daily board meetings with other pimps, where they not only discuss how to keep wages down, but also exchange technical details concerning the manipulation of their "ho's." They establish their employees' working hours, which they call "git down-time," the same way. You can usually tell which ho's belong to a "mack-man" and which are "outlaws" since all the organized ho's get out on the street at exactly the same time every night, while the "outlaws" come and go as they choose.

Since they were the ultimate losers in the hierarchy of exploitation, I always felt close to black prostitutes, who often offered me hospitality (although naturally these were the "outlaws"). Because I was one of the few men in their lives with whom they didn't have either a sexual or business relationship, they could express toward me the humanity they'd retained.

Both from 1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

1996 - Astoria, NY

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

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

The hustle of gender dynamics in the ghetto and higher up

One reason we got along so well was no doubt that they, as outlaws, were compelled to know every detail of "the system in the lower ghetto" to stay free of pimps, while I, as an outlaw (vagabond) in the greater society, had gradually acquired a certain knowledge about it in order to survive. We'd arrived in very different ways at a common outlook. Since the parallel between the superstructure and the substructure was evident, it was easy for these women to see the inner dynamics of the combined system that caused their double oppression: racism and sexism.
The relationship between pimp and prostitute is in many ways just a wild exaggeration of the relationship between man and woman in the lower ghetto, or even in society as a whole, in which one of the man's many "hustles" consists of obtaining "broad money" from women in return for protection against her being "hit on" by sexually aggressive men. In such a society, a woman sees a man, to a horrifying degree, as at best an object for obtaining money and luxury. She's often very straightforward about her desire to "marry a rich man"

This rapid form of ghetto escape was shocking to me since I'd rarely seen such selfish traits in Danish women, perhaps because in a more egalitarian welfare state, such exploitation between the sexes doesn't make the same sense. The prostitution inherent in buying women through wealth or status is particularly evident in the American upper and lower classes.

Within its closed system, the underclass has been instilled with the same admiration for "sharp pimps" and "righteous hustlers in "fine threads" as people in the larger society are taught to have for maverick capitalists. Such flashy pimps and hustlers "making it are dangerous role models for ghetto children, attracting them to the street institution at the age of 8 or 9, but, like the nouveau riche capitalist, they're also pitiful erratic figures continuously manipulating everyone—they can never become lax or their empire will collapse. I learned this when I spent a year working in a church that tried to organize prostitutes into a union that would protect them from both brutal police raids and pimps.

1987 - Harlem, NY

Remember QR-update on Martha to the right

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

1973 - With Geegurtha in Greensboro, NC

2003 - With Geegurtha in Atlanta

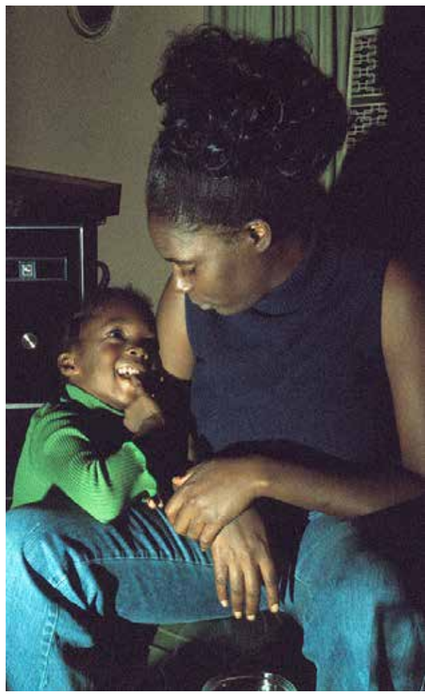
Geegurtha's struggle from slavery to liberation

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

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

Among the prostitutes who made the strongest impressions on me was Geegurtha, who was struggling to get out of this slavery. When I first met her, she'd just been in prison and been almost totally destroyed by drugs and violence. Her daughter was born an addict but was saved through blood transfusions. During the five years Geegurtha was a prostitute, she saw nothing of her daughter Natasha. But through an enormous effort, Geegurtha became "uphabilitated." The motherly love she gave since then—expressed in this photo—is deeply moving and even miraculous to me when I recall her from the days when she was a wreck. She became manager of the clinic that had helped her, went to college, and majored in psychology.

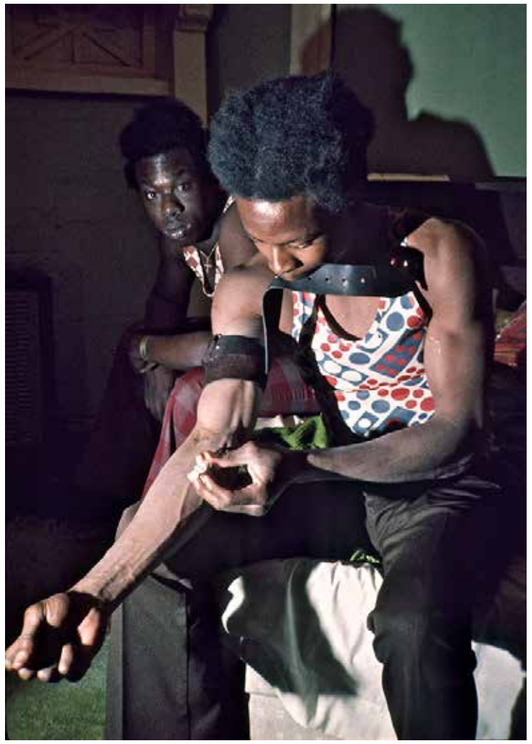
I'd met Geegurtha when Tony Harris, a social worker, invited me to speak to the hardcore convicts in his drug rehabilitation program. Gee invited me home one day because, she said, she'd learned so much from my analysis of their criminal backgrounds. She was living with her deeply religious family, who was afraid she'd fall back into drugs and prostitution. So her sister Georgia, employed by a church, asked me to move in with them and even to share a bed with Geegurtha and Natasha for a week. She felt it would be helpful for Gee's healing to develop an intimate and trusting relationship with a man not based on sex, money, or violence. Her religiously supervised healing was so successful that she never regressed, and 30 years later Tony took this picture of us replicating the picture Georgia had taken of us on a Sunday morning before church in 1973.



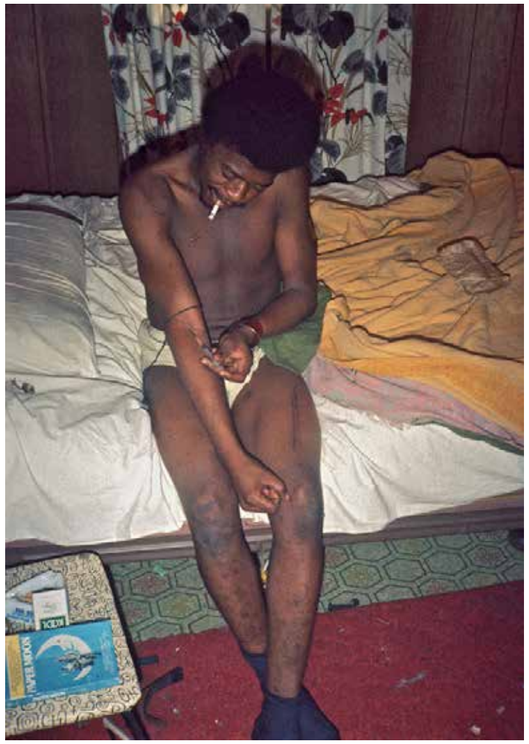
1973 - With daughter Natasha in Greensboro, NC

1973 - Greensboro, NC

1973 - Greensboro, NC



1974 - Jacksonville, FL



1974 - Daytona Beach, FL

The fight for black motherhood and fatherhood in the closed system

After seeing all the obstacles put in the way of a black mother's love, I was very touched by Gee's sunshine story. The odds are just as bad for fatherly love. This man, who let me share his bed in a one-room shack in Florida, was shooting up first thing in the morning. Unable to kick his habit, his family life had deteriorated, and he was deeply pained by not being allowed to be with his child. When I lived with Baggie, the mother with these three children, she'd also been an addict but had gotten "clean" and put all her love into giving her children a good religious upbringing. But when I came back a year later, she'd been sentenced to 25 years in prison for armed robbery. The American platitude that "the family that prays together stays together" didn't hold true. People we confine to a closed system usually take the fastest way out—often minutes before they're about to make it. They've so completely internalized our white racist expectations of them they have no faith in their ability to succeed in ordinary ways. Most people somehow understand why a prisoner with seven years left to a sentence takes the chance and escapes instead of patiently waiting to exit hell legally. Not until I myself nearly became ghettoized (page 433)—rather than merely living the privileged vagabond life in ghettos—was I able to feel how the closed system functions exactly like a prison in which you have neither the psychic surplus nor the means to invest in a seven-year education that might get you out the conventional way. Ghetto actions are therefore typically desperate, driven by short-term goals determined by the fact that you already live in a prison. For such people no prison or any kind of punishment will be a sufficient deterrent.

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

1974 - Jacksonville, FL

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

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco - above and below

1974 - New Orleans

1975 - San Francisco

Below 1974 - New Orleans

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

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

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

Toni Morrison in NYC, 2015

Misunderstood Escapes: Challenging Criminal Stereotypes

Criminal escapes, such as robbery and fraud, are no more typical of shortsightedness than the more lawful escape attempts constantly referred to in racist stereotyping. The climate of death and fear kills long-term trust in the future and in 1970 made it easier to buy a Cadillac than to save money to someday move out of a rotten shack. Coming from a welfare state, I found it ironic that contemptuous white Americans constantly referred to a "low gratification threshold" among blacks while their own lives were tied up in a shortsighted tax revolt, trying to heap BMWs, yachts, and unnecessary gadgets over their own threshold. When you refuse to pay for the common good, you invite criminals to your house. A country deserves the criminals it produces.

The ghetto criminal directly challenging these inequalities is the most misunderstood and unduly feared person in white America. He's actually of little danger to whites; more than 95% of US crime is white on white or black on black. Adjusted for income, the black crime rate is almost the same as the white rate even though most inner-city black children suffer from PTSD after living—some for generations—in virtual war zones, often with higher murder rates than American soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many also suffer from generational trauma resulting from sexual abuse and neglect.

Paradoxically, the more violence I experienced in their gangs, the safer I felt under the "ghetto code," the informal norms under which violence is considered legitimate to gain respect and you kill because someone "dissed" you. With their feelings of shame and loss of dignity after a childhood of humiliation and later in life, prison rape, they loved to pose for my camera with their respect-inducing weapons. Since shame makes you see yourself through the eyes of others, you are ashamed of the way you think society sees you and try to compensate for your feelings of inadequacy.

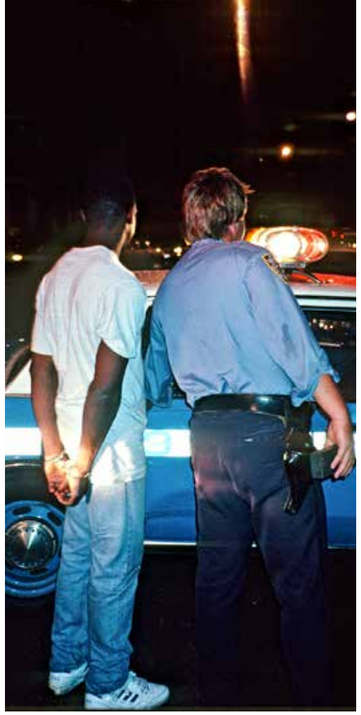
By seeing them without judgment, as victims with no hope and a great need for positive recognition, it was easy for me both to survive among them and to see solutions in the interest of the whole. Due to their low self-esteem, their actions were often so self-destructive that I can proudly say I participated in several attacks—because my friends didn't tell me about them, nor did they themselves have any such plans beforehand. When they saw a victim, they acted thoughtlessly, in a vicious cocktail of deep-seated hatred and self-hatred, not out of necessity. Just as colonized children everywhere will steal from someone who shows them paternal kindness, I found that even the adult "rip-offs," "stealers," and even "strong-arm studs" were driven by Shakespearean motives:
"I am one, my liege, whom the vile blows and buffets of the world have so incensed that I am reckless what I do to spite the world." (Macbeth, Act 3)

1975 - San Francisco

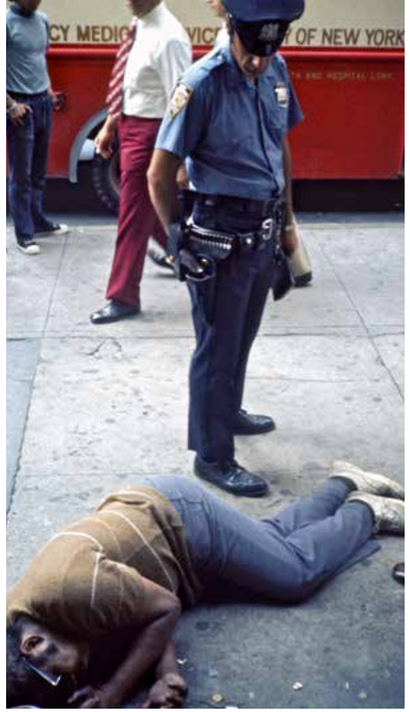
1973 - Baltimore

1974 - Brooklyn, NY

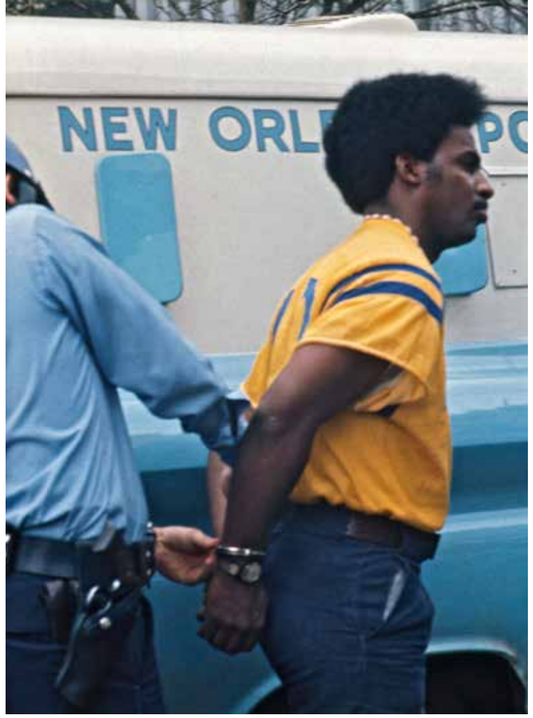
1991 - Bullock County, AL



1975 - San Francisco



1975 - NYC



1973 - New Orleans

1973 - New Orleans

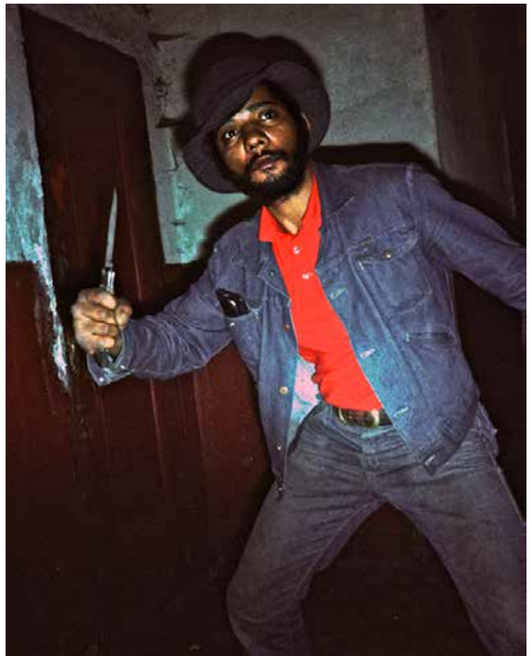
Below 1974 - NYC and 1991 - Memphis, TN

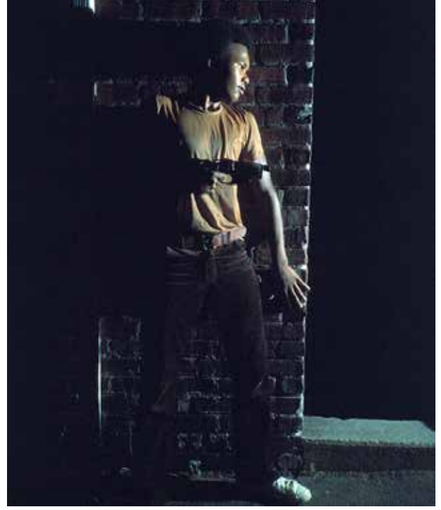
In light of their longing for love and nurturing, it's not naive to believe that working with minority criminals, as I often see idealists in the US doing, can provide an alternative to their attempts to find recognition in gangs. Even in gang-ridden Sweden, Nicolas Lunabba's work among Muslim gangs in "Hela Malmö," for example, shows how little it takes to change the behavior of violent youths with low self-esteem. By offering them basic resources—security, trust, and a sense of being seen—they can be helped out of their self-destructive behavior at a fraction of the cost of incarceration. Both they and society benefit.

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

1975 - San Francisco

1991 - NYC and below 1975 - NYC





1975 - Richmond, VA (Willie Hurt)

1975 - Malibu, CA

1989 - Harlem, NY

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

The internalization of oppression in the caste system through divide and rule

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

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

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

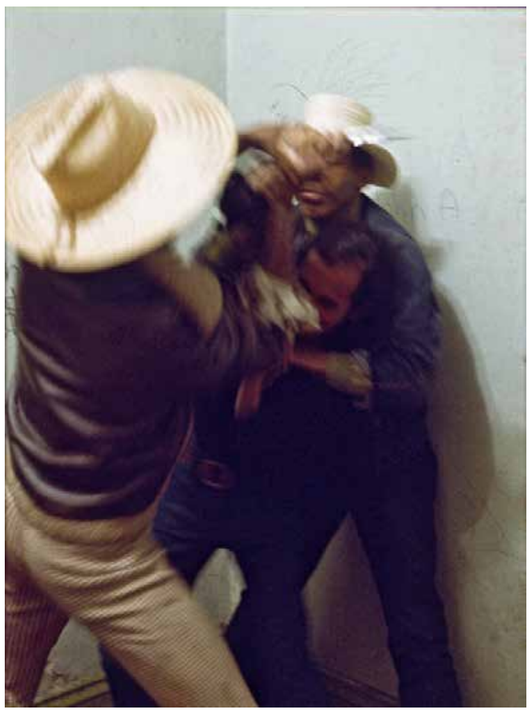
All my life I've heard black American children pick on each other with "you act white" or "you're not really black"—almost the same hateful words I hear today in brown children in Denmark: "you're too Danish," "you're not really a Muslim," "whore" (about girls who dress "too Danish" or just differently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

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

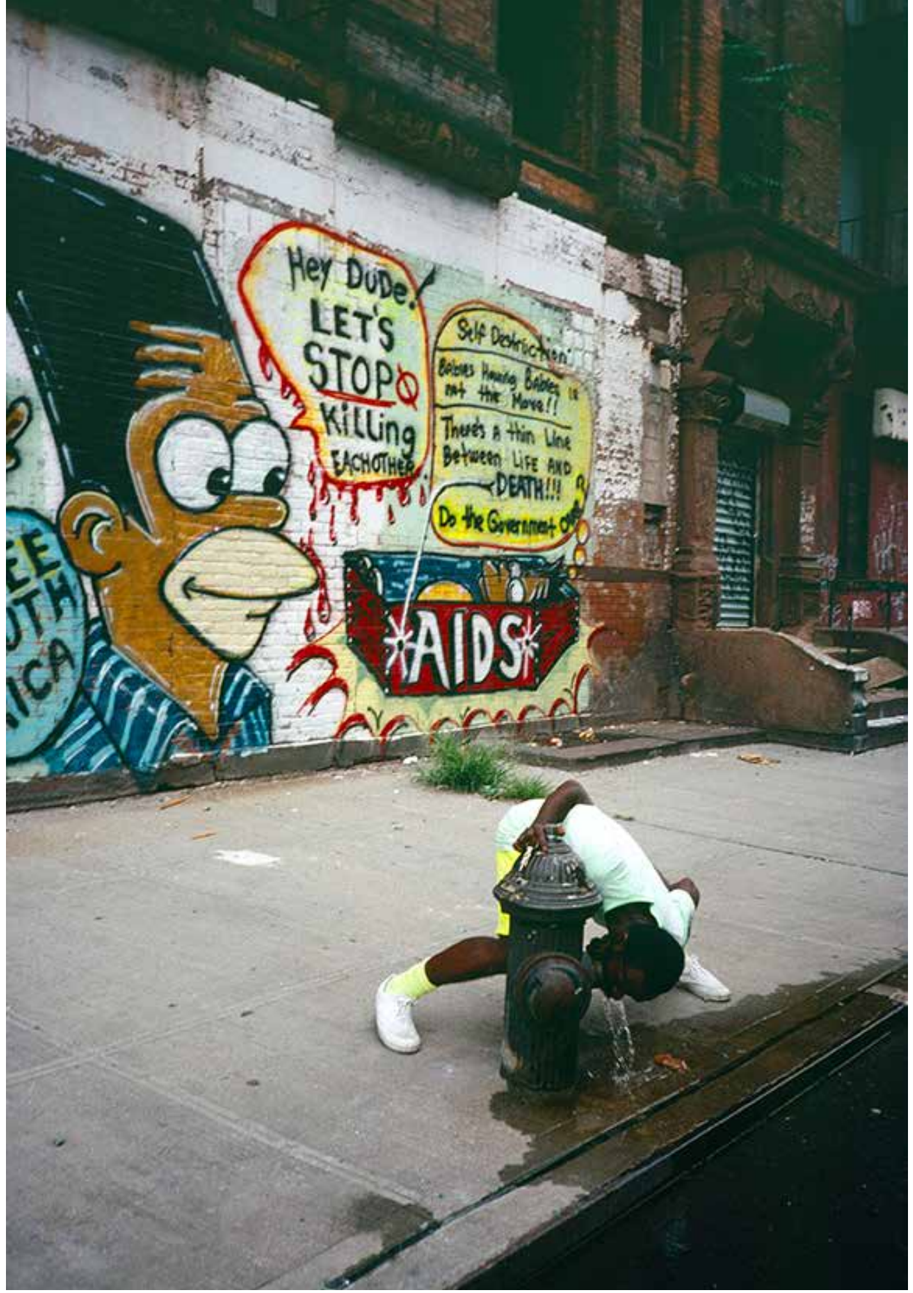
Yet I know whites well enough to believe that, except for a few FBI "Cointelpro" actions, there's no conspiracy against blacks. There's no need for it since our daily "innocent" racism, our daily activities, and master-race vibrations function as effectively as the most well-plotted conspiracy. When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

Freddy is dead song by Curtis Mayfield - illustrated

1988 - NYC



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1989 - Harlem, NY

1995 - Queens, NY

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

By the early '80s I counted 22 friends who'd been murdered. Since then I lost track. Simon Williams, whom my 6-year-old son had played with in the Astoria ghetto in 1986, was the fourth person I'd known in the same family to be murdered. At his funeral in 1995, the minister, who was quite a tragicomedian, started out with "We have reached the darkness where we can't cry our pain out any longer. Let's laugh it out." And then he started cracking jokes so in the end all the 150 guests in the funeral home were roaring in the laughter, even Simon's sister Cathrine seen here below. Yet, when I came back a few months later to give her my pictures, she too had been murdered, hit by stray bullets along with several others in a grocery store. Cathrine was the fifth murder victim in Lela Taylors family.

1995 - Queens, NY - Cathrine and husband during funeral

1995 - Queens, NY

Among Eloi and Morlocks

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

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

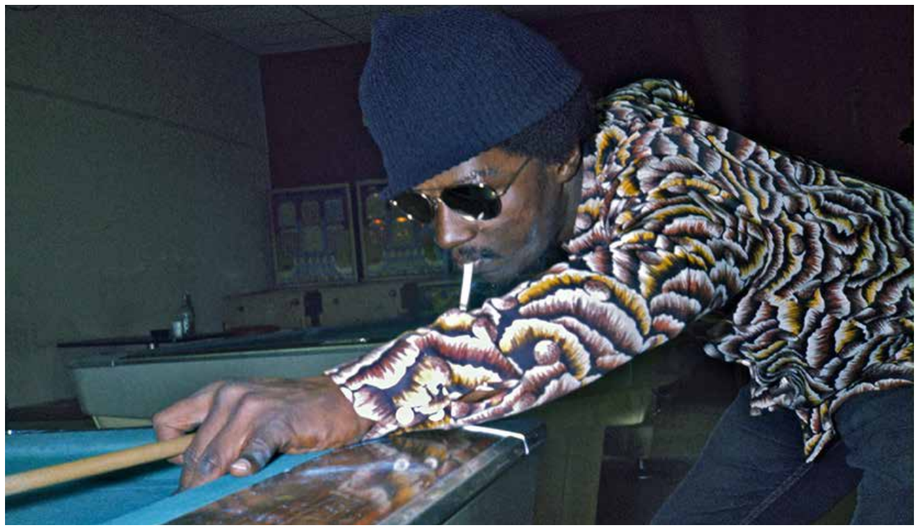
In North Carolina a millionaire I often stayed with loaned me one of his cars, a big Buick, so that I could get out to the most deserted back roads, where it's impossible to hitchhike. After having seen much poverty throughout the day, I got to Wilmington that evening. I had heard that there had been racial disturbances in the town, so I felt like getting to know it a bit better. As always when I come to a new town, I started from the bottom by going into the worst neighborhoods. I parked the car far away since you cannot communicate with people if you roll up in a car. I grabbed my shoulder bag and walked down the street as if I had just hitchhiked into town, and then went over to one of the worst black bars on one of the main streets. I love these dingy combination bar-and-grills with the small jars of pickled pigs' feet and pepper, and often sit in such a bar for hours. There is always something happening. But this evening things went wrong.

It was around eleven o'clock and completely dark when I got to the place. There was the usual crowd of half-criminal types outside: the hustlers. They often look mean and dangerous in their sunglasses, but they are not that bad if you treat them right. I really love them, because it is such a challenge for me to find the human being behind the sunglasses. It's either win or lose; if you make a wrong move it can mean death. Like all criminals, they are actually extremely timid and therefore react spontaneously and nervously. I use as a rule of thumb that the darker their sunglasses, the more afraid they are of me and of each other. But as soon as you gain their trust and the sunglasses are removed over a glass of beer or a joint, they show themselves to be fantastic people and will do anything for you. That's why I always seek them out first when I come into a new town since they have lots of contacts. I am always completely honest with them and don't pretend to be anything but what I am, never trying, for example, to imitate their language or to use the common white sentimentality about "we are brothers" and all that crap they have heard so often from whites. One must remember how paranoid they are and that they have no faith in whites in general, or their own people, or themselves. They have been trampled on all their lives and that oppression cannot be overcome through any phony "brother" talk. But by speaking absolutely honestly you can show them in various ways who you really are, and what you want, you can overcome their suspicion. They need to know who they are dealing with. It is, for instance, this strong desire that makes many blacks prefer the Southern racist over the Northern liberal, for with the racist they know where they stand and can respect him for his honesty, while the liberal always says one thing and does another. With my pictures and my detailed descriptions of what I have done in other ghettos, it is usually not difficult to convince them of my identity (whenever I know myself what my identity is). They are never totally convinced that I am not an undercover cop, yet they almost always take the chance. Every person has a need to be human in this social system and there is always a risk involved in that. If you let the mask fall, you risk being hurt. Both the capitalist and the criminal are in their everyday life so strongly deformed by the roles dictated for them by the system that they have an unspeakable urge toward human kindness. This urge they have a chance to express with the vagabond, who stands completely outside the system. In order to get something to eat or a place to stay, the vagabond must always talk to the "good" (the humane) in the capitalist or the criminal and when he first realizes that this is always possible, then he can no longer condemn them as "capitalists" or "criminals," but concludes that they all have possibilities for acting in accordance with a system other than the one that usually directs them. Thus, the vagabond instead begins to condemn the system he always has to struggle against in order to survive.

Therefore, even the worst criminals usually take that chance with me, and gradually, as the worst distrust subsides, and some beers go down, we can fall quite in love with each other in mutual admiration of the roles we usually play. They are always interested in what I have learned from other criminals, and the more "hustles" I describe, the closer we are bound to each other. But in the exchange of ways to "cop" (the word that covers everything the criminal needs, whether it is a bag of heroin, a car, a gun, a woman, or wine), I always emphasize putting it in a political context. Often the events we are exposed to in the course of such a night become increasingly criminal. I know that in order to get a place to sleep toward morning, I have to convince them that I am with them all the way. So the first night in a new town I usually don't get much sleep; but in this way I gain a foothold in other social circles of the ghetto, since the criminal's sisters, brothers, parents, and friends are not necessarily criminals themselves.

But this night in Wilmington something went wrong. I received the same hostile vibrations from the people outside the bar as I always get, but there was no possibility of breaking the ice. No matter what I said, it didn't get through. They started making threats and said, "We're militants, get your ass out of here or you're a dead man." I was so stunned that my survival philosophy

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco



1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

didn't work that I went all weak in the knees. I felt suddenly that I had no control over events and gave up. I walked a bit farther down the main street, but to get back to the car without passing them again, I turned off to the right through an unlit "project" - as these municipal poorhouses are called. But just as I turned in there, I noticed that they had started after me. Apparently they perceived this to be their territory. I made the mistake of running further in in order to hide from them. I hid under a bush and saw that they were suddenly all over, about a dozen of them. I started shaking, I was so shocked at this development. I realized that I didn't stand a chance and ran out into a dark alley to surrender. I was immediately surrounded, knives and guns pointing at me from all sides. From that moment I don't remember exactly what happened, just that I began rattling off a lot of words. I said, among other things, something like that they should wait just two minutes, look at my pictures and hear why I was there, and if they didn't like it, they could kill me then. I don't know if that was what tipped the balance, but after much yelling and screaming about what they should do with me, what finally happened was that they led me out to the main street with guns and knives in my hack. I was shaking at the thought that someone might pull the trigger by accident. They said that I should walk straight up the road until I was out of town. In order to get back to town, I now had to walk two miles out and then two miles back on a parallel street. I thought about calling a taxi or the police, but gave up the idea. I had no money for a taxi and felt it was wrong to use the police. If I was seen with the cops, they would really be convinced that I was not on their side. So in the darkness I ran from tree to tree down the parallel street to avoid being seen from cars, as it could be my attackers in the cars. The scene was exactly like the movie "In the Heat of the Night" – only racially reversed.

1975 - Tenderloin, San Francisco

I got back without a scratch and roared out of town at full speed. I had had enough of staying in the ghetto for that night. I have since tried to analyze what I did wrong that evening.

There's no doubt that I failed because I was dishonest with the criminals. I pretended to be a poor vagabond who needed a place to sleep, but in fact I was not poor since the car was hidden nearby, and I knew all along that if necessary I could sleep in the car that night. I hadn't been completely honest with them, and therefore could not make the positive impression that would open them up.

I then drove out to a white community nearby. After this grim experience I began to feel that something fantastic would happen that night. That's how it almost always goes when you travel: when you are the most down, you will be the highest up right afterward. Just as when I two weeks earlier stood in shirt sleeves freezing in a snowstorm for hours on a back road in West Virginia, unable to get a lift, and that same evening landed at the Rockefellers'. If as a vagabond you are not possessed of this fatalism you are lost, for just by virtue of your conviction you are able to communicate such strong positive energy that you yourself are actually helping to create a favorable situation.

Anyhow, when I stepped into a bar on Wrightsville Beach that night, I was not totally taken by surprise by what happened. I had been standing there alone for some time when a very sweet young woman came over and pulled my beard and wanted to know who I was. Then things happened pretty fast and she began pouring a lot of wine into me. When, as a vagabond, you stand completely alone in the world, you are very weak in such situations and fall in love incredibly easily. But when only an hour earlier you have been closer to death than ever before, then this falling in love takes on such violent dimensions that it becomes totally overwhelming. Any human being who had shown me warmth that night, I would have bound myself to forever. One of the first things she asked me was if I had a place to live. When I said no, she immediately said that I should move in with her. She would give me all the money I needed and a gasoline credit card for the car. It turned out that she belonged to one of America's richest families, who own the Schlitz brewery. I will never forget that night. Usually I am impotent the first night with a new woman, but the violent experience was still so much

with me that I was thinking more about that, and therefore everything went as it should. It was exactly the same as that time in New Orleans when Mary Ann Westbury and I witnessed one of our friends kill another while we played pool, and afterward we went home and made love all night long. Sex and violence are probably very intimately connected. On the whole, I feel that many of my love affairs in the U.S.A. have been brought about by a violent experience – or have resulted in one. My love for this country could be of the same nature. That night we fell so much in love with each other that she started talking right away about getting married. When we got married we would receive $50,000, and thereafter $30,000 a year. "I want to have a child with you," she said. During the first days I myself was so convinced that I was getting married that I started writing to all my friends that "now I had finally found the right one."

I was fascinated by her and her upper-class nature. She spent money as if it were water. The first week we spent hundreds of dollars, and she had to telegraph her father in Europe for more money. I enjoyed going to the finest restaurants, eating lobster and steak, which felt good after several months of "soul food." But I still insisted on continuing my exploring and drove out in the car in the daytime to photograph the poverty and hunger in eastern North Carolina. An expert on geophagy (dirt eating) had told me about the hunger in the area.

During the day I photographed hunger, and at night I gorged myself on steaks. Every other day I spent with my fiancée on a nearby island, which was only for rich people. There was a guard on the bridge to prevent blacks and other poor outcasts from getting out there. We lived in a lovely big villa and lay on the beach all day loafing. It was here I first began to lose interest in her, as I was simply bored to death. In the beginning she took a certain interest in my "hobby," but gradually it became clear that she perceived

1974 - Charleston, SC

blacks as subhuman. I have often fallen in love with Southern racists because of their exoticism and charming dialect and my own fascination with the person behind the master/slave relationship, but it slowly dawned on me that you cannot base a marriage on such a fascination. I began to feel that our child would be more the product of violence than of love. When I asked what she would do if we drifted apart, she said, "Don't worry, I've got enough money, I can get an abortion any time." She was still madly in love with me, but I was starting to get my feet hack on the ground. So when shortly afterward she had to travel to the Galapagos Islands to look at turtles and wanted to take me with her, f at first felt very tempted, but nevertheless said no. It would be good to get her at a little distance and cool off. She asked me to come back for her birthday, which I promised to do.

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

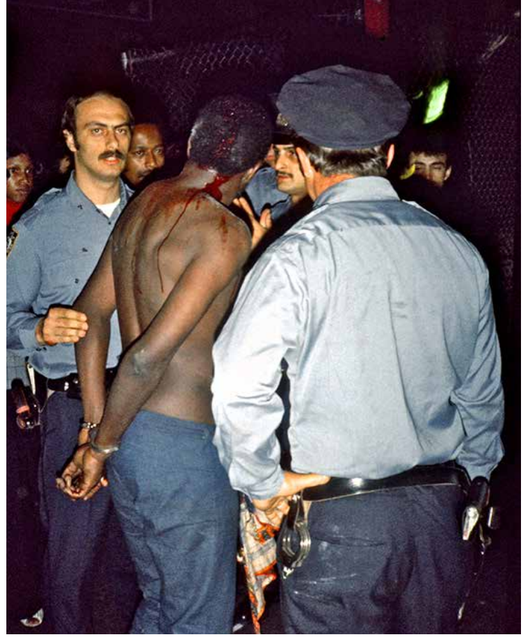
Now she had no feelings left for me, she said. I felt she was very shallow, but I'd been superficial myself. I was both deeply hurt and very relieved at the same time, said farewell, and went back into the ghetto in Wilmington to have another try at getting to live there. I went into the same bar, but this time in the daytime and bought a round of Schlitz for the people there with the money I had left from my days of luxury. And this time I succeeded in being accepted, and there was chatter and talk and a warmth without equal. It was at that time that Schlitz started their new ad campaign with the slogan "Only love is better than Schlitz." Every time I saw it around the country I thought of Wilmington, and its violent racial hatred.

Summary of letters

Afternote. I am not here mentioning the Schlitz woman's name nor bringing photos of her since sometime in the '80s her parents told me she had just committed suicide. I found it strange that the only two of my old "girlfriends" who later committed suicide were both millionaires.

Both 1974 - Harlem, NY

1974 - NYC



Below 1973 - NYC

1973 - New Orleans

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

Searching for the inner goodness behind the shadows of anger

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

The crime of the poor, like the exploitation by the rich, is almost impossible to photograph. You can take pictures of the result, but rarely of the process itself. Usually I'd be with criminals for days before photographing them. In order to survive among them, it was a necessity that I always had faith in the inner goodness of these children of anger, directing myself toward the human being inside and away from the role the system had forced them to model their lives on. By photographing their shady activities, I was relating more to their environmental side and thus in a way betrayed the trust they'd given me. I always wanted to photograph crime as seen from the point of view of the criminal, but to do that I had to set myself at a distance and so was no longer "one of them." Recording the system's violence was easier than photographing its counter-violence.

Here I was caught in a shootout between police and criminals in Harlem. A policeman rushed over and used my doorway as a firing position, and I suddenly found myself (photographically) on the side of the police. On such occasions I began to understand the brutal but all-too-human reactions of the police. Their racist attitudes and lack of understanding of the ghetto's reactions are among the reasons for the angry charges of police brutality. Society has trained the police to expect the worst instead of communicating with the good in people. Therefore, they often shoot before they question. In general, I find it to be an act of violence to carry weapons into a ghetto since this shows that you have no faith in the people of the ghetto, which breeds counter-violence. In my first two years in America, I still harbored internalized white fear—the main ingredient of all racism. So until I learned nonviolent communication and positive inner thinking about fellow human beings, I was constantly beaten down by blacks. The police build on the negative in people and thereby encourage it. If they instead arrived unarmed, with open faces, they'd have a chance to foster the positive sides I always managed to find in even the worst types, those "who'd kill for a dollar" – or for a camera. Instead, the police create a climate of fear on both sides, which makes brutality inevitable. Until today's tell-tale video revelations put a stop to it, most police violence was sanctioned by white authorities. Many states allow the police to break into people's homes without knocking. Many innocent people have been killed in this way.

No knock song by Gil Scott-Heron - illustrated

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

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

Black Lives Matter: James' and Barbara's love

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

One day I saw in the New York times a picture of Mayor Lindsay presenting a bouquet of flowers to a "heroic" police officer in a hospital bed. It said that he had been shot down while "entering an apartment." I decided to find out what was actually behind this incident and nosed around the Bronx for several days to find the relatives and the apartment where it all took place. Little by little I found out what had happened. James and Barbara were a young black couple living in Fort Apache, the worst neighborhood in America at the time, around Fox Street in the South Bronx. One day they heard burglars on the roof and called the police. Two plain-clothes officers arrived at the apartment and kicked in the door without knocking. James thought it was the burglars who were breaking in, and he shot at the door but was then killed by the police. Barbara ran screaming into the neighbor's apartment. When I went to the 41st Precinct police station they confirmed the story and admitted that "there had been a little mistake," but James of course "was asking for it, being in possession of an unregistered gun." I was by now so used to this kind of American logic that I did not feel any particular indignation toward the officer. I just felt that he was wrong. Since I had spent so much time finding out the facts of the case. I might as well go to the funeral, too. I rushed around town trying to borrow a nice shirt and arrived at the funeral home in the morning about an hour before the services. I took some pictures of James in the coffin. He was very handsome. I admired the fine job the undertaker had done with plastic to plug up the bullet holes. Black undertakers are sheer artists in this field; even people who have had their eyes torn out they can get to look perfectly normal. Since black bodies arrive in all possible colors and conditions, they use almost the entire color spectrum in plastic materials. James did not make any particular impression on me; I had already seen so many young black corpses. The only thing I wondered about was that there wasn't any floral wreath from the police. I waited about an hour, which was to be the last normal hour that day. Not more than ten people came to the funeral, all of them surprised at seeing a white man there. A young guy whispered to me that he thought it was a little unbecoming for a white man to be present at this particular funeral. Ssuddenly I heard terrible screams from the front hall and saw three men bringing Barbara in. Her legs were dragging along the floor. She was incapable of walking. I could not see her face, but she was a tall, beautiful, light-skinned young woman. Her screams made me shudder. Never before had I heard such excruciating and pain-filled screams. When she reached the coffin, it became unbearable. It was the first and only time in America I was unable to photograph. I had taken pictures with tears running down my cheeks, but had always kept myself at such a great distance from the suffering that I was able to record it. When Barbara came up to the coffin, she threw herself down into it. She lay on top of James and screamed so it cut through marrow and bone. I could only make out the words, "James, wake up, wake up!" again and again. The others tried to pull her away, but Barbara didn't notice anything but James. I was at this point completely convinced that James would rise up in the coffin. I have seen much suffering in America, but I have often perceived in the midst of the suffering a certain hypocrisy or even shallowness, which enabled me to distance myself from it. Barbara knocked my feet completely out from under me. Everything began to spin before my eyes. It must have been at that point that I suddenly rushed weeping out of' the funeral home. I ran for blocks just to get away. My crying was completely uncontrollable. I staggered down through Simpson and Prospect Streets, where nine out of ten die an unnatural death. Robbers and the usual street criminals stood in the doorways, but I just staggered on without noticing them, stumbling over garbage cans and broken bottles. It was a wonder that no one mugged me, but they must have thought I had just been mugged.

When I got to James' and Barbara's apartment building, still crying, I asked some children if there was anyone up in the apartment "of the man who was shot the other day." They asked if I didn't mean the man who was shot in the building across the street last night. No, it was in this building, I said. But they had not heard that anyone had been shot in their building. They lived on the third floor and James and Barbara lived on the sixth floor. I went up to the apartment, which now stood empty. Robbers had already ransacked it, and there were only bits of paper and small things scattered around on the floor. The emptiness of the apartment made me sob even harder. There were bullet holes all over in the living room wall where James had been sitting, but there were only two in the door which the police had kicked open.

There were three locks on the door like everywhere in New York, as well as a thick iron bar set fast in the floor – a safety precaution the police themselves recommend that people use to avoid having their doors sprung open by criminals. James and Barbara had been so scared of criminals that they had put double steel bars on their windows although it was six stories up and there was no fire escape outside. Down in the courtyard there was a three-foot pile of garbage people had thrown out of their windows. Here James and Barbara had lived since

1974 - Bronx, NY

they were sixteen with their now four-year-old daughter. After a couple of' hours I ventured out of the apartment. I had cried so much that I had a splitting headache, and all the way into Manhattan the weeping kept coming back in waves. When I came to a movie theater on the West Side, I wandered in without really knowing what I was doing. It was at that time that movies directed by blacks were being produced for the first time in history. The film was called "Sounder" and was about a poor family in Louisiana in the 1930's. There was an overwhelming sense of love and togetherness in the family, but in the end the father was taken away by the white authorities and sent to a work camp for having stolen a piece of meat. The film was made in Hollywood and romanticized the poverty; after several years in a work camp, the father came back to the family, so the film would have a happy ending. This wasn't the kind of poverty I had met up with in the South. The only time I cried in the movie was when I saw things that reminded me all too much of James and Barbara. Afterward I wandered over in the direction of Broadway. An old black woman whom I had stayed with in the North Bronx the night before had given me ten dollars so I could get some nice clothes for the funeral. She had at first not trusted me and had spent several hours calling various police stations asking them what was the idea of sending an undercover cop to her house. But when after half a day she had assured herself that I was not a police agent, she was so happy that she gave me the ten dollars, and I had to promise to come stay with her again, and she telephoned to Alaska so I could talk with her daughter who lived up there. Now I still had a little money left over and went in my strange state of mind straight into another movie theater on Broadway and saw "Farewell, Uncle Tom." It was a harrowing film about slavery. It was made by non-Americans (in Italy), so it didn't romanticize slavery. You saw how the slaves were sold at auction, the instruments of torture that were used, and you saw how men were sold away from their wives and children. It was frightful. How could all this have been allowed to happen only a hundred years ago? At some points in the film I almost threw up. I looked around the cinema repeatedly, as I was afraid that there would be blacks in there, but there were only two people in the whole theater besides me. When I got outside, there was a young black guy hanging around with sunglasses on. I stood for a long time looking him in the eyes, and I couldn't understand why he didn't knock me down.

For days afterward I was a wreck. I will

never forget that day. It stands completely blank in my diary. A whole year went by before I pulled myself together and sought Barbara out. But when I came to the kitchen at the veterans' hospital where she worked, an old black woman was sent out to talk to me. She told me that she was Barbara's guardian, since Barbara had not been herself since the funeral. She had become very withdrawn and never spoke any more. I asked her what Barbara had been like before James' death. She went into deep thought for a moment and then told me with tears in her eyes about the four years when James and Barbara had worked together there in the kitchen. They had always been happy, singing, and a real joy to the kitchen personnel. They had never missed a day of work, always came in together and always left together at the end of the day. But she wouldn't let me see Barbara, for Barbara did not wish to see anyone.

Another year went by before I sent a letter to Barbara from somewhere in the South. I assumed that by now Barbara had gotten over her husband's murder. When I again went to the kitchen, the same elderly woman met me. It was as if time had not passed at all, and we just continued where we left off. She sighed deeply and looked into my eyes. "Barbara has gone insane," she said.

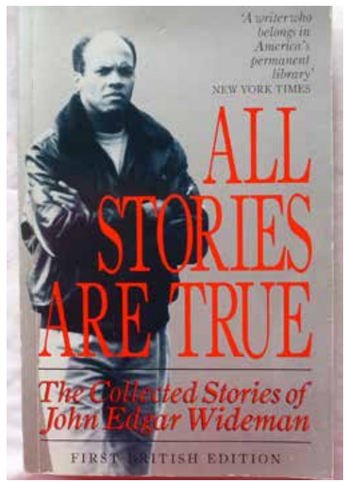
Barbara kept coming up in my thoughts wherever I traveled. But another event came to make just as strong an impression on me. Somewhere in Florida an unhappy white woman had climbed up a water tower and stood on the edge, about to commit suicide. But she couldn't make herself jump. It was in a ghetto area and a large crowd of people, most of them black, gathered at the foot of the tower. The police and fire department were trying to persuade the woman not to jump, while the crowd shouted for her to jump. I was totally unable to comprehend it. I shouted as loud as I could: "Stop it, stop it, please, let the poor woman live." But their shouts grew louder. It was the worst and

1974 - Bronx, NY

most sickening mass hysteria I had ever experienced. Then suddenly it hit me that the screams sounded like Barbara's on that unforgettable morning. I started getting weak in the knees and rushed off, just as fast as at the funeral home. In five years I will try to contact Barbara once more. I must see her face again someday!

Summary of letters

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



1975 - San Francisco, CA

1973 - Jersey City, NJ with World Trade Center behind

To fight oppression, understand the Victims on Both Sides

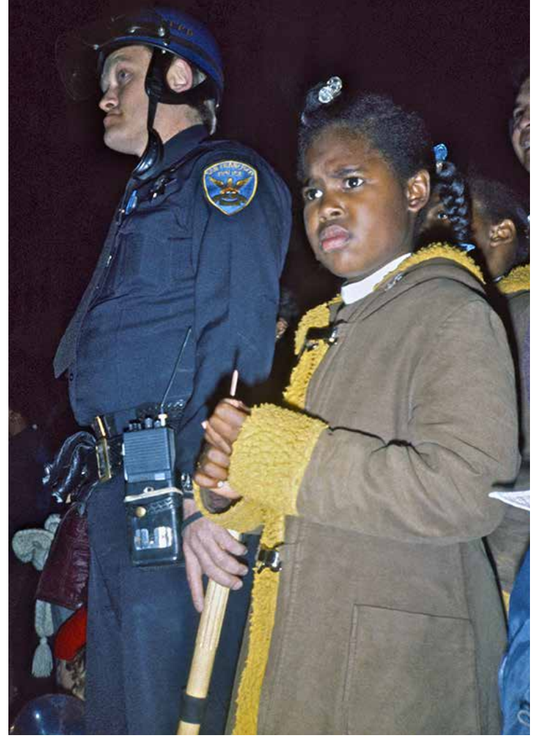
"You cannot fight an enemy that you do not understand." - Malcolm X

On the day I became one with the suffering, I could no longer depict it. The screams from people in the closed system drowns in a vacuum for the world outside. A white policeman beating a black woman was shot down in anger by a young man on a roof. In retaliation, 5,000 officers are marching through the ghetto to intimidate our oppressed. Every time a policeman is killed by a black sniper, the entire apparatus of colonial power is set in motion in this way. But there's a deeper tragedy underlying these sad police murders. The 26-year-old widow of the deceased officer comes, as did he, from the poorest white stratum of society. Although it doesn't excuse their brutality, one can very well understand it – exploited and downtrodden as these whites themselves often have been. Facing such grim prospects in life, they had no choice but to join the ranks of the old slavedrivers. The racism and lack of trust that a poor under-stimulated upbringing has instilled in them is exacerbated by their nervousness about being part of an occupying force in a culture to which they don't belong.

1973 - Jersey City, NJ

1975 - San Francisco

1972 - Miami



1975 - San Francisco

Maintain Faith in the inner Goodness behind the System

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

It's become common to attack the police, but we forget that they're just as much the victims of the system as they are its representatives. We look at their tight lips and hardened faces and despair. One can only infer that they will forever be marked with bitterness, hatred, and apprehension. But did they sit in front of the mirror of their own free will and create these faces?
Or were they forced to live a life which tightened their faces into a perverted distortion of humanity?

Yes, it's difficult to create a more just society since even to see the possibility of change means to have enough faith in the inherent goodness of humanity and in your everyday life to be able to look beyond the distress patterns that everywhere paralyze us. Our duty is to change this system, which is based on our shared accumulated pain, so people can become fully human all over the world. In so doing we'll also save the planet from the worst of all our oppressions: the destruction of our environment, the climate, and our children's future. I know that I couldn't have survived among all the strange people in America if I hadn't had strong faith in the best in people. Without that faith, the worst would've gotten the upper hand, and I would've been obliterated.

1972 - Miami Beach, FL

1973 - Jersey City, NJ

1972 - Miami Beach, FL

1971 - NYC

1971 - NYC

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

1971 - Brooklyn, NY - Funeral of Attica victims

1971 - Brooklyn, NY

Muligvis sort baggrund på venstre side

Finding humanity in the midst of hate and oppression

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

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

My journey has taught me that I can no longer hate any single person or group or even class of people, not even the worst exploiters. If I said that I hated the Rockefeller family, I'd quite simply be lying. Certainly it's true that Nelson Rockefeller ordered the massacre at Attica, murdering ten guards and 33 inmates who were only demanding much-needed prison reform and to be treated as human beings. But even though I was present at the mass funeral and heard the armed Black Panthers in the church shout "Death to Rockefeller! Jail the rich, free the poor!", and even though I knew several relatives among the weeping families, and even though I once again saw the color of blood in the African-American flag ... yes, even then I was not capable of hating Rockefeller.

For I know that behind the role he was brought up to perform and believe in within the system is a human being who under other conditions wouldn't have become a murderer in a desperate attempt to keep inmates of the ghetto in place. If we understand that the underclass is murdering and robbing because of its environment, we must also logically acknowledge that the upper class, in its actions, thinking, and tradition, is slave-bound by its milieu. The more I let myself be brainwashed into the upper class, the more its actions started to seem valid.

1974 - Attica prison, NY

1971 - NYC

1991 - Washington, DC

1985 - NYC

Only Love can defeat Hate

"We can't expect the world to change if we don't change ourselves." - Solange Knowles
"Love is an endless act of forgiveness. Forgiveness is me giving up the right to hurt you for hurting me." —Beyoncé

I'd also be dishonest if I tried to conceal the fact, that I've come to like the people I've met from America's upper class. When I condemn the upper class, it's really a condemnation of the system in us that created these classes and teaches its members to rob and murder not only in the US, but also in the Third World—an inhuman system so strong it can't be changed by merely attacking its symbols. If I had hated the Rockefellers as symbols, I would've denied them the human warmth and hospitality they'd shown me as a vagabond under conditions not dictated by the system.

The longer I wandered as a vagabond in this system, the more I lost the desire to ever again become a part of it. Everywhere the system had given people a false face. The more distinctly these deformed masks outlined themselves for me, the stronger was my urge to get behind them and look out through the eye slits. It was never a beautiful sight—just hatred, fear, and mistrust. I had no desire to become a part of that hatred. I learned it's much easier to hate and condemn than to understand.

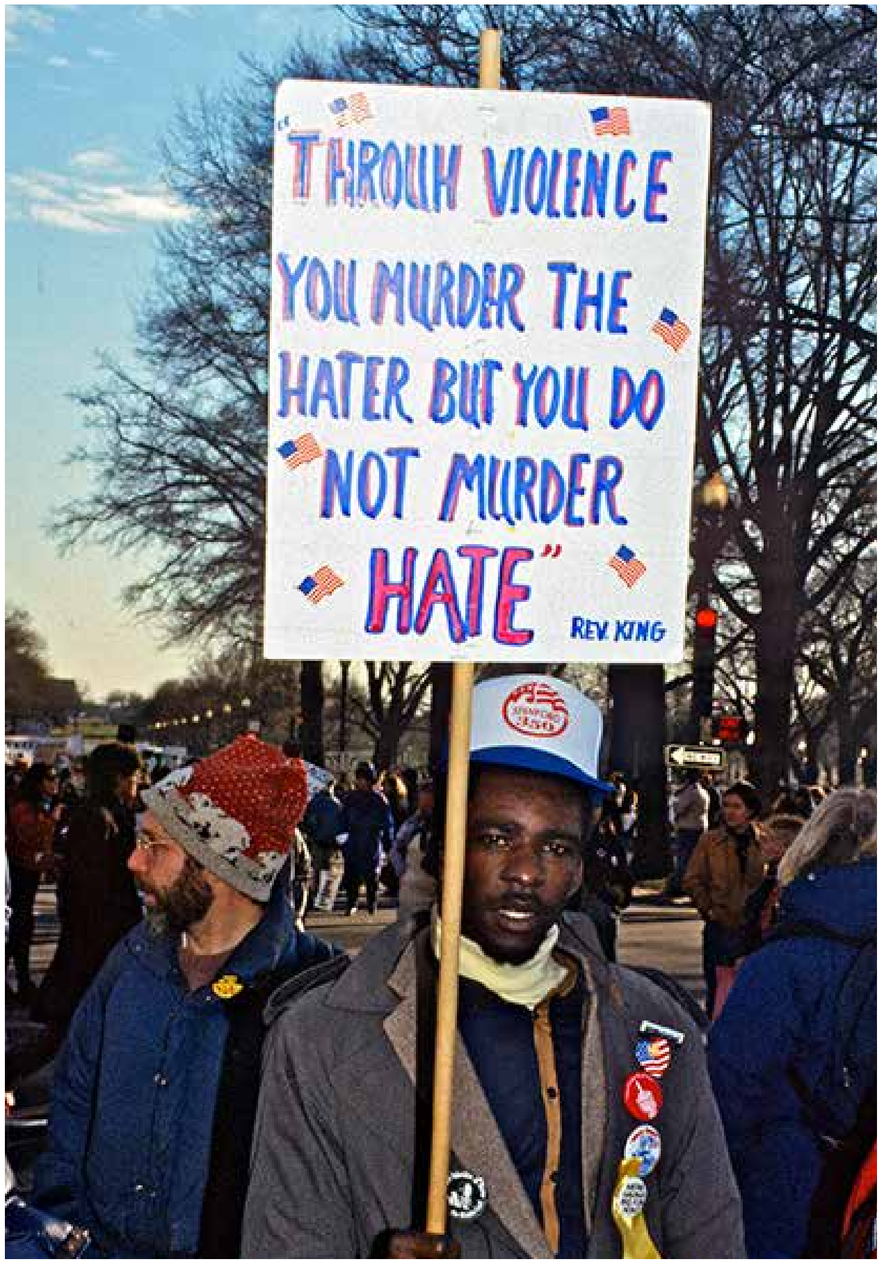
Hatred is based on simplified one-sided considerations and most people are so absorbed in the pain of not being able to live up to the norms of their milieu that it's easier for them to reduce reality to symbols rather than understand it. It's far easier when reading a book like this one to hate whites than to try and comprehend us because that way you avoid fighting that part of the system in yourself. Not until we realize how we ourselves are a part of the oppression can we understand, condemn, and change the forces that dehumanize us all.

I was able to survive outside the system because I always sought the human being behind the false façade. But behind these façades I always saw the defeat of love. The fewer the threads connecting people in a wholesome society, the more petrified and impenetrable seemed the masks I had to penetrate to survive. But even within this oppression, it's possible to find many shades of humanity. Even if love between people has been killed in this system, we all know love can still shoot up through the asphalt whenever ... wherever ...

1990 - NYC

1991 - NYC

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



1991 - Washington, DC

1991 - Bullock County, AL

1974 - Jersey City, NJ

1975 - Bullock County, AL

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

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

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

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

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

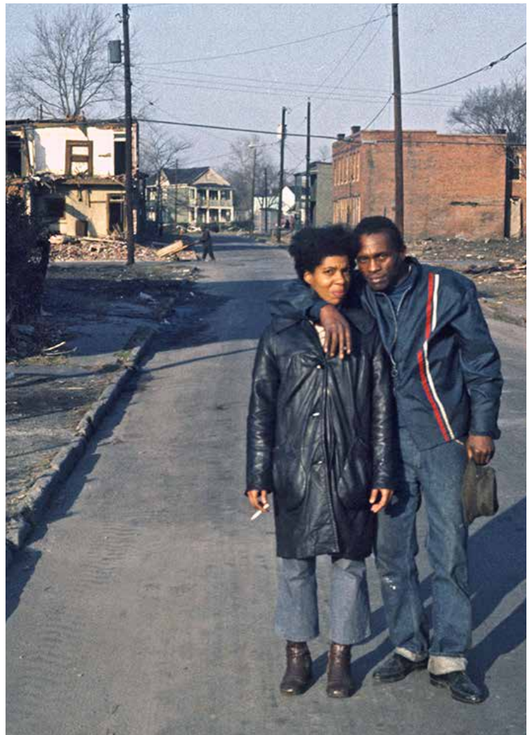
"Black love is not just a feeling, it's a commitment, a fight, a revolution." - Janelle Monae,

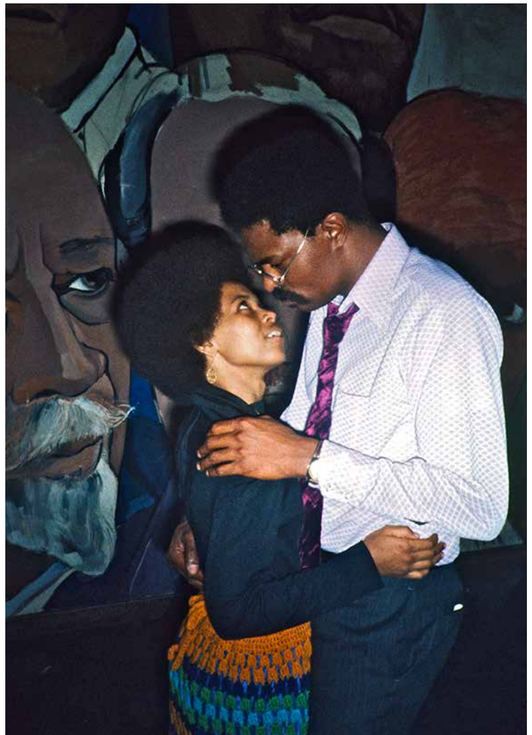
1975 - Richmond, VA

1974 - Norfolk, VA

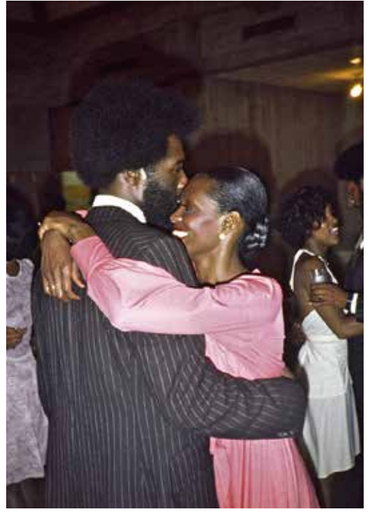
2009 - Gainesville, FL

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

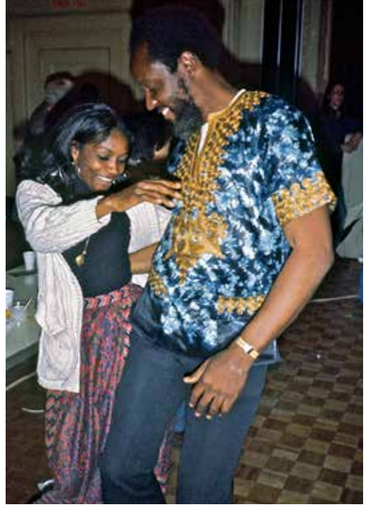




1975 - Philadelphia, PA - René Yates and boyfriend - See update about her life



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



1975 - San Francisco

1975 - San Francisco

1985 - Harlem, NY

2012 - St. Francisville, LA

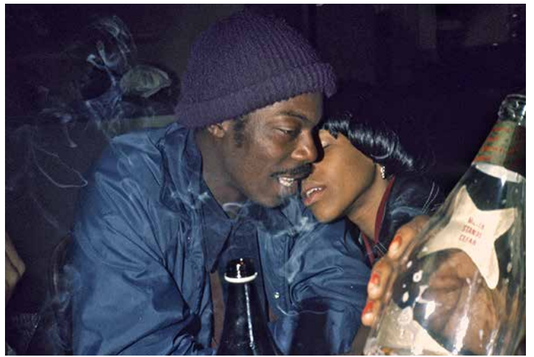
"Our love is a tapestry woven with threads of joy, pain, resistance, and triumph." - Ta-Nehisi Coates

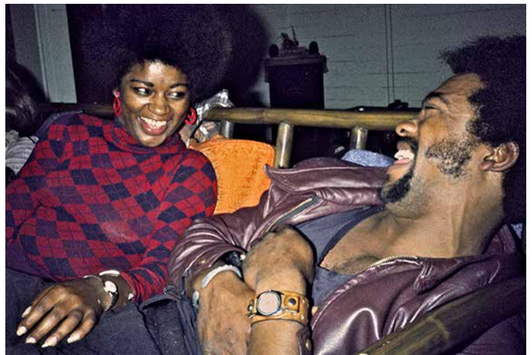
1973 - Greensboro, NC

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

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

1973 - Zebulon, NC. - Caroline was later murdered





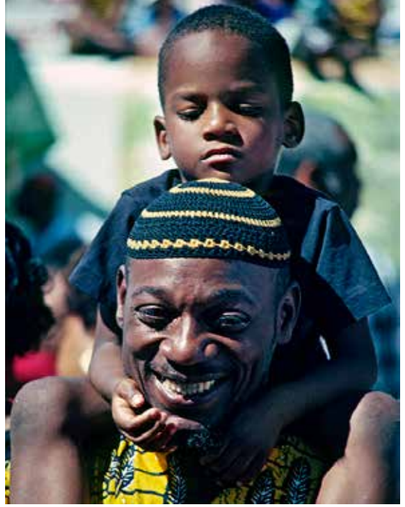
1974 -
Abilene, TX

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

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

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

2004 - NYC



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

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

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

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

1996 - Chicago

1991 - Houston, TX

Below 1975 - Philadelphia, PA

1975 - Baumont, TX

Below 1978 - Jacksonville, FL

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

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

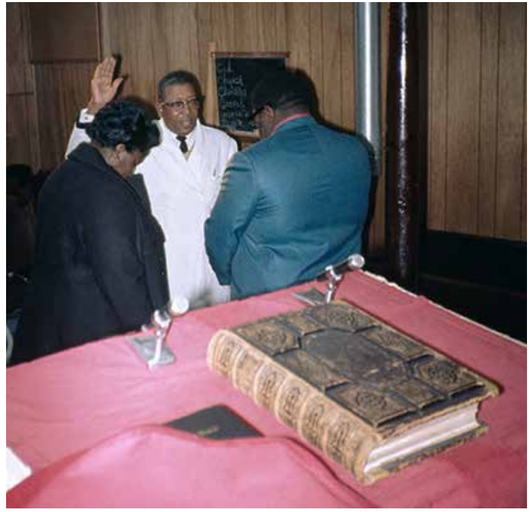
"Love is a revolution. It's what keeps us going, what breaks the chains, what makes us free."
– H.E.R.

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

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

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

1996 - Tunica, LA - Bibel reader



1973 - Baltimore - Wedding in storefront church

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

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

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

Both 1975 - San Francisco

1975 - San Francisco

1973 - from rural church outside Houma, LA

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

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

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

Both lelow 1975 - San Francisco - Fillmore ghetto storefront church

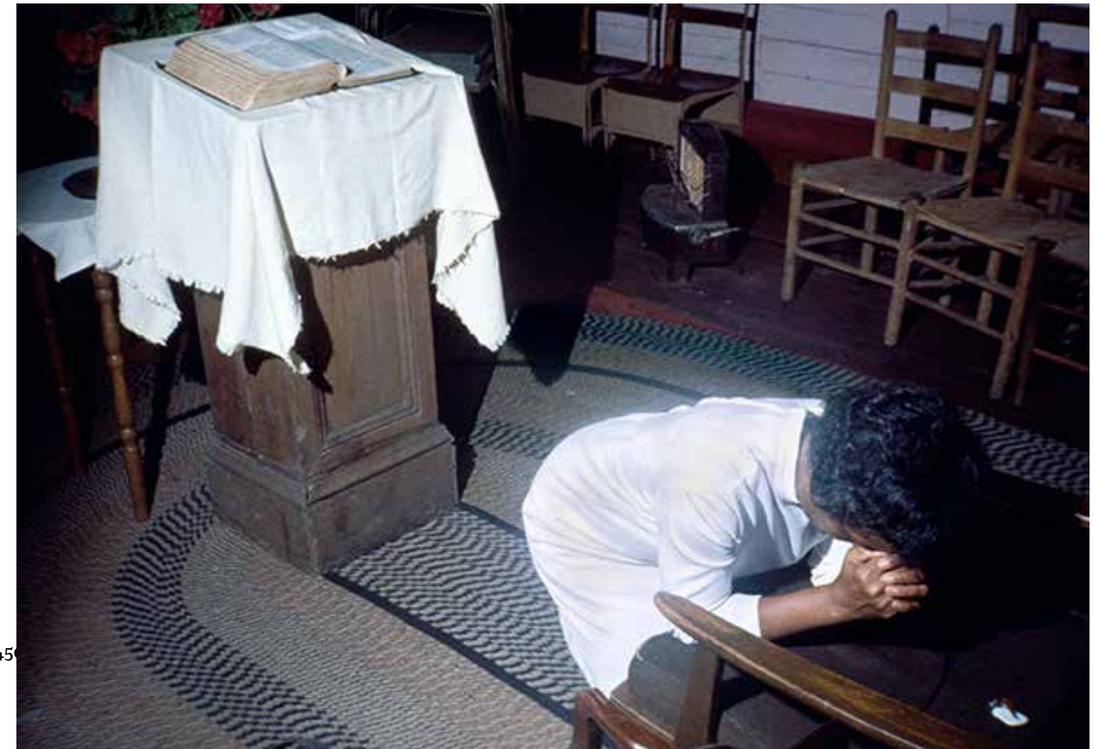
1975 - Philadelphia, MS.
Hands of my father-in-law,
Rev. Jake Rush

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

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

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

1975 - Meridian, MS - Shack church



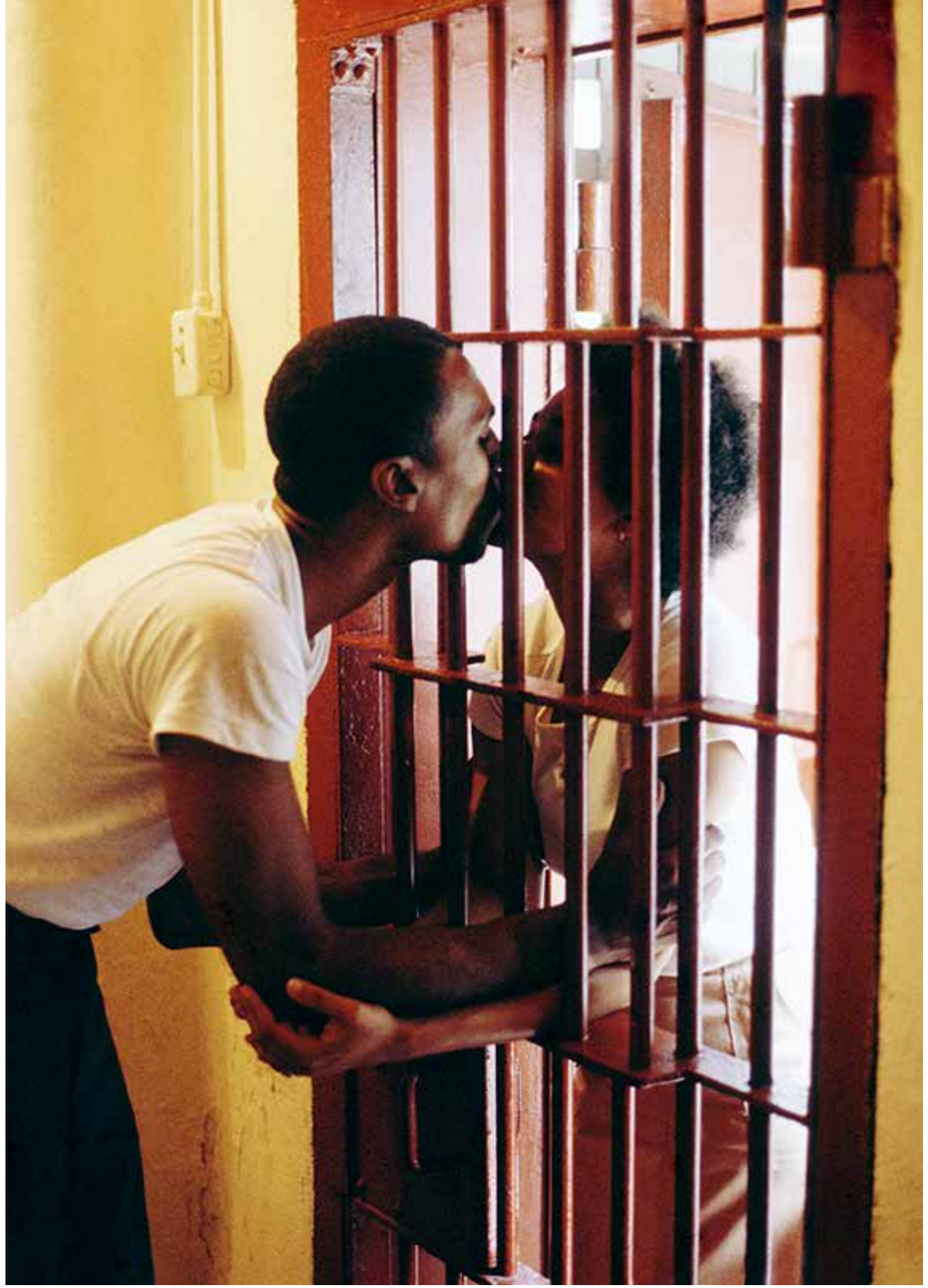
2009 - Harlem, NY - Mosque on 116th St

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

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

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

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



1978 - Washington, GA

Possible black background on left page

Ghetto love

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

"There is no love like ghetto love"

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

Annie had to a large degree freed herself in her exile from the master-slave mentality which makes marriage almost insupportable for those few unfortunate Americans who fall in love athwart the realities of the closed system. For "intermarriage" is indeed a subversive act. Even liberals grope for an answer when the question comes: "Would you want your daughter to marry one'?" I usually found common segregationists starting conversations with, "I don't care whether people are white, black, purple, or green..." Ten sentences later they would be sworn enemies of "intermarriage." Yet until it was prohibited in 1691, there were plenty of intermarriages between white and black indentured servants, and prior to the reduction of blacks to slavery the "poor white" hatred of them was unknown. In most other countries, even post-slavery countries like Cuba and Brazil, there is nothing resembling the fanaticism of Americans towards intermarriage. Although I come from a conservative rural area I cannot recall having heard a single negative remark in my childhood about the frequent international marriages of Danes to African students. On the contrary I sensed a strong solidarity and even envy towards those moving to distant lands. But in America no interracial marriage can be viewed as simply a natural union. In Hollywood, black promoters wanted to invest a lot of money to publicize my slideshow, but first they wanted me to take out the section on my wife: "It destroys your message, makes you look like just another liberal." Many blacks and liberals will for the same reason fall away in this chapter. A black woman was furious after seeing my slideshow with photos of several naked black women (unaware as she was of my Danish culture, where nudity was highly cultivated back then: Family beaches and inner-city parks were packed with nude Danes mere minutes after the sun broke through). "Aren't you aware of how irresponsible you have been having had relationships with all these mentally unbalanced women? Aren't you aware that slavery makes us all mentally ill?" She hit the core question: How can I interfere as a neutral in a master-slave society without becoming a part of the problem? And yet she made the same mistake as most Americans of automatically assuming that a photo of a naked woman equals a sexual relationship with her.

She need not really worry, for unlike what I found among black women in most of Africa, the black American woman has developed strong defense mechanisms against the white man in response to centuries of abuse. Although I spent most of my time in black communities, more than 90% of the women who invited me to share their beds were white. But the suspicion of the white male sexual exploiter naturally always hung over me in my journey. Walking at night in ghettos in the deep South young men would ask, "Sir, you want me to get you a woman?"

I am fairly convinced that most women would not have offered me hospitality if they had not sensed the non-aggressive component in me. Since I always saw my vagabonding as a passive role and thus neither avoided nor initiated sexual relations I think it is interesting to analyze what actually happened when I came close to women. After a few days, if we got along well together, white women would express sexual aggression. But even if we became intimate and embraced each other, usually nothing more would happen with the black underclass woman, especially in the South. It was as if something misfired in us both – a shared acknowledgement that this was too big a historical abscess to puncture. She could not avoid consciously or unconsciously signaling that this was a relationship between a free and an unfree person, which immediately gave me the feeling of being just another in the row of white sexual exploiters. Most of my sexual and long-lasting relationships with black women were therefore with women from the middle class or the West Indies who, although more conservative than white and underclass women I met, had nevertheless freed themselves from this slavery to a higher degree. Some Americans would say that if you are aware that certain people live in slavery you should not as a privileged white get yourself into such intimate situations where a sexual relationship or "intermarriage" could arise. But slavery is a product of not associating with a group completely freely as equals, thereby isolating and crippling it.

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

1975 - Annie in the Tenderloin, San Francisco

Annie was one of my exceptions with the underclass. Although on the surface she seemed very "middle class" after her long stay in England, she was in her fundamental outlook marked by her underclass upbringing. Such a relationship could probably have worked with much trust and effort by both partners, but because of my racism, sexism, and above all that unseeing "innocence" which will always be the ultimate privilege of the ruling class, this wasn't what happened. Instead it became such a painful crushing defeat for me that I for instance couldn't reconcile it with my original book. Even the beginning went wrong. We got married Friday the 13th of September, with no place to live.

A maid let us spend our honeymoon in the luxury apartment of the South African consul who had been called home by his apartheid regime. Afterwards we ended up in the worst area of the ghetto. We had hardly paid the first month's rent before all Annie's savings were stolen. We lived on the fifth floor of a building with only prostitutes, destitutes, addicts and welfare mothers. Annie had not lived in underclass culture since her childhood and it was a terrible shock for her to end up here. Due to her looks and the place we lived she was constantly "hit on" by pimps and hustlers, who tried to recruit her. While I stayed some days with Margo St. James (leader of CYOTO for American prostitutes), Annie was kidnapped by a prostitution ring who forced her at gun point to strip naked while they played Russian roulette with her "to break her in." At night she managed to flee through a bathroom window without clothes out into the city streets. When I came home she was lying dissolved in tears and pain.

The attacks of the pimps continued, and it didn't help matters that I was white. One day a pimp scornfully threw a handful of money at Annie on the bus. With my old vagabond habits, I picked it up. Annie was furious with me and wouldn't talk to me for a week. There were violence and screams and frantic pain in the building day and night. Several times in the beginning I tried to intervene between pimps and the ho's they were beating. There was also a pyromaniac. Almost every night during the first months we were woken up by the fire alarm and saw flames burst out from the adjoining apartments. We were so prepared that we had everything packed all the time. The first thing I would grab was a suitcase with all the thousands of slides for this book. One night, when we were all standing half-naked in nightclothes on the street, I asked Annie to keep an eye on the suitcase while I photographed the fire, but when we got back up to the apartment, we realized we'd forgotten the suitcase. I rushed down to the street and found the suitcase still standing there. Everyone in the building called it a true miracle as nobody had ever seen any valuables left on the street for even one minute without being snatched.

The psychological pressure was at first worse on Annie than on me. We tried to get welfare in order to move, but got only $7. Almost every night she lay crying in despair. In the first months, when I still had some psychic surplus left, I tried to penetrate the world which had so evidently disintegrated for her.

Like most of my other relationships in America, this one was due to violence. We had met each other as a result of the murder of her mother; and a few months afterward her stepfather was found staggering down the street mortally wounded by a knife. A horrifying pattern from her childhood began to appear for me in these tear-filled nights. When her 16-year-old mother had given birth to her and a twin sister it was seen as such a sin in the minister's family that the mother had been sent up North and Annie down to an aunt in Biloxi, Mississippi. All Annie recalls from these first four years was the drunken aunt always lying in her shack, while Annie sat alone outside in the sand. One day she almost choked to death on a chicken bone and struggled desperate and alone. Nobody came to help her.

The grandparents discovered the neglect and took her back to Philadelphia, Mississippi, where she received a rigorous fundamentalist upbringing. She was punished if she played or danced or displayed even the slightest joy. Often she was hung by leather straps around her wrists in the outhouse and whipped to a jelly. On the way home from school, there was almost daily rock-throwing between the black and the

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

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

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

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

white kids. One day the white kids turned German shepherds on them and Annie was severely bitten. Two of these white children later joined the Ku Klux Klan, and one of them, Billy Wayne Posey from Annie's street, was the one who later murdered three civil rights workers in 1964.

After this Klan violence, with parades of burning crosses through Annie's street, she fled up North and later went into exile. She loved to read, but since she was the first black to integrate the town's library, she never dared to return. And the black children had always ostracized and mugged her

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

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

for "being too white" for the same reason. The more these tearful nights revealed, the more shocked I was. She was incredibly sensitive, and one night I recall her crying at the thought of "the white conspiracy" which had kept her and the other black school kids ignorant about the murder of six million Jews.

No doubt she'd have cried even more had she known that the Holocaust was inspired partly by the pain she had experienced during the first 29 years of her life: The Nazis based the Jewish laws of the 1930s directly on the American Jim Crow racial laws in order to stigmatize otherwise well-functioning Jews. These laws made endogamy illegal, and the one-drop-of-blood rule made them an inferior, impure "race."

Finally, Annie managed to get a temporary office job in the Bureau of Architecture, where she took care of bills from construction companies. She caused great turmoil by discovering one swindle and fraud after another. With her unusual flypaper memory, she could detect how the construction companies had months before sent bills for the same job but in different wording. For years these Mafiosi had ripped off the city. Every day she came home and told me about how she had just saved the city $90,000 or the like. When her job ended, her Jewish boss told her she could write any recommendation she desired: He would sign it. But we ourselves still had no money, and it was as if this corrupt atmosphere helped to further break down our morale. When the rich steal, why shouldn't we? When we one day found a purse with $80 in it in the hallway, it took us a long time to decide to give it back to the owner a welfare mother. When she opened her door she grabbed the purse without a word, with a contemptuous look as if to say, "You must be fools, trying to be better than others here." From that moment everything slipped more and more in a criminal direction. It had been our idea that I should use the time to write a book. Annie and others felt that I ought to write about my ghetto experiences with the eyes of a foreigner. In the beginning I sat day after day in front of a blank sheet of paper, but it was impossible for me to get a word down in that violent and nerve-wracking atmosphere.

Gradually we both lost our self-confidence, and I gave up. The less surplus we had, the less hope, the more violent did the atmosphere become between us. Little by little Annie started to drink in response to my increasing insensitivity. She began to nag me for being nothing but a naive liberal. These endless nights are more than anything the reason for my attacks on liberals (or myself) in this book. For the first time in

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

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

my journey I began to lose faith in blacks - to look at their actuality rather than potential. I was becoming Americanized, had become a victim of the master-slave mentality. The more I lost faith in people (and my own future), the more I seethed with hatred and anger. To avoid the unendurable atmosphere with Annie, I began to spend most of my time on the street. The more powerless I became, the more dismal my prospect, the more she lost faith in me. One night she shouted, "You can't even provide! You hear, blue-eyed nigger, provide!" What was even worse was that although I constantly tried to get work I started blaming myself. I did nothing but stand in line. In the mornings I sat and lay in line in the blood bank to get $5. Every day at 11:00 for eight months I stood in an hour-long soup line and at night I would often eat in a church. The rest of the day I would stand in line to get work, which was impossible as I had no skills. If I got there at four in the morning, I sometimes succeeded in being hired for a day to hand out advertisements in the affluent suburbs for $2 an hour.

After a while I gave up and spent more and more time with the criminals in the street. I was never involved in any large-scale criminal activity, but I was clearly moving in that direction. One night, when a guy was telling me shakenly that his brother had just been murdered in Chicago, I just replied coldly, "What caliber pistol?" Only afterwards did it dawn on me how far down I had slipped. During the time I'd lived with Annie, eight people had been murdered on our block, some of them acquaintances. Theresa, who had so often given me free food in her coffee shop, was murdered by a customer who couldn't pay his bill of $1.41. Sometimes, even the walls in our hallway were smeared with blood.

When I came home late at night, Annie would often be lying in a fog of tears and booze. I hardly cared any more. In the end, for fear of the destructive quarrels, I would not come home until she was asleep. Our sex life, like everything else, disintegrated.

Finally I harbored such hatred for both the blacks and whites around me that I became afraid of myself. One night when Annie had been drinking I became so desperate that I aimed a blow at her in the darkness. The next morning she had a black eye like everyone else in the building had had. Having never before laid a hand on a person, I was shaken. I had a sudden fear that I would end up killing her one day. The only way I could break the ghettoization

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

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

was flight. We managed to get a tiny room for Annie in a white home outside the ghetto. After that I went straight for the highway. The highway, I knew, meant security and safety, healing and freedom.

For five years I had lived an escapist privileged vagabond life in ghettos without being affected. When I became a part of the ghetto, I was destroyed in less than a year, had ended up hating blacks, had lost faith in everything and everyone, and had seen my worst aspects take control of me. One of these was an increasing selfishness and aggressive callousness in my relationship to women. It was no coincidence that I immediately entered a period of conspicuous consumption of "girls" with my friend Tony in North Carolina. I had no inhibitions left. And yet I was not exactly a born seducer. Time and again Tony whispered to me, "Hey, why don't you make a move?" and time and again he ended up having to drive my date home prematurely. And then every night there were disturbing obstacles. One night I couldn't get home with my date because of a shootout in the street. Another night we all went to see Earth, Wind and Fire in Chapel Hill and I used my white privilege to "con" my way in for free as I never had money. This so irritated Bob, who drove the car, that on the way home he suddenly stopped and said, "Hey, man, you gotta get out, understand?" Since Bob was a double murderer, having killed both his wife and her lover, and everybody knew he boiled inside, nobody tried to intervene and I had to get out in the frosty night in the middle of nowhere.

An essential tool in dating is the car. Since I couldn't take my dates for a ride I instead invited them for what I loved most of all in the world: hitchhiking. It was these trips more than anything else which made me aware of my sex-ploitative frame of mind. I had lived with blacks so often that I paid hardly any heed to being "on the wrong side of the tracks," but to hitchhike with a black woman quickly shakes one into "place" again, especially if one is as ignorant as I had managed to remain about the additional master-slave relationship of men to women. Because of my vagabond attitude that the driver should be "entertained," if the driver was a woman or a gay man, I would sit in front to make conversation, whereas if it was a straight man I would make the woman sit next to him, even if she didn't want to. The reactions from the white male drivers were terrifying. If they didn't content themselves with psychological torture of the women, they would use direct physical encroachment. Although most of those I hitchhiked with were well-dressed daughters of professors and doctors in the North and had the education and trust in their surroundings which made them – unlike ghetto women – even dare to go on such a trip with a white, they were considered as nothing but easy sexual prey or even whores. Several times lustful drivers violently tried to push me out. For some of these women it was their first chance to see their country. Most didn't even last to the state line. Annie had lasted 4,000 miles through Canada and the Grand Canyon – then broke down in a hysterical fit which almost had us both arrested.

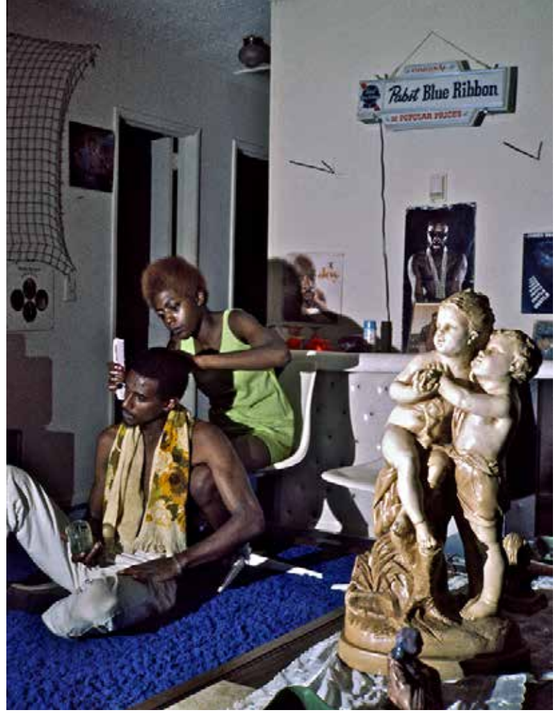
I was still enormously out of balance after my ghettoization and felt I needed a calm family atmosphere to get back on my feet. After having lived in a couple of white homes, I searched back to the most harmonious and stable married couple I could recall having seen in the underclass: Leon and Cheryl in Augusta, Georgia. Their love and devotion to each other had been so enriching and contagious that I often thought of them in the course of my own abortive ghetto love as living proof to myself that real ghetto love could thrive. While I had lived in their home I had had peace and support, enabling me day after day to hitchhike out to explore the poverty in the area. But when I came to their house I immediately felt something had changed. Leon asked me in, but he was not happy. He seemed to be in a trance as he told me his wife had died from a disease which was curable, but they hadn't had the money to get her proper treatment. Leon had not recovered from the loss. He never went out of his house, which stood right next to the elite medical school

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

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

Never have I seen a man's love for a woman so intense. At most once a day would he turn around and communicate with me, and then only to tell me about how he wanted to join Cheryl in heaven. Sometimes when he stared directly at me with this empty look as if I were not there my eyes would fill with tears. I felt a deep understanding for him, yet couldn't express it. In the evenings he lay in his room. His mother or another woman would bring us cooked food in the two weeks I stayed there. This depressing experience made me look deeper into myself. I became determined to go back to Annie, and later she returned with me to Denmark. Our relationship had suffered too much, so after a while we separated. We achieved a good working relationship and she helped translate parts of this book and select the photos and music for slideshow it was made from.

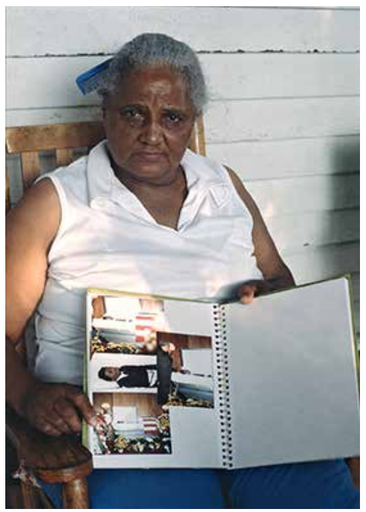
Three years later I traveled all over America to give this book to all those friends who made it possible. One of them was naturally Leon, who had helped me so much and was one of those I had in mind to come and help run the show in Europe. But when I came to his screen door with the book under my arm,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



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

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

Annie Holdt died in 2002 after a long illness.



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

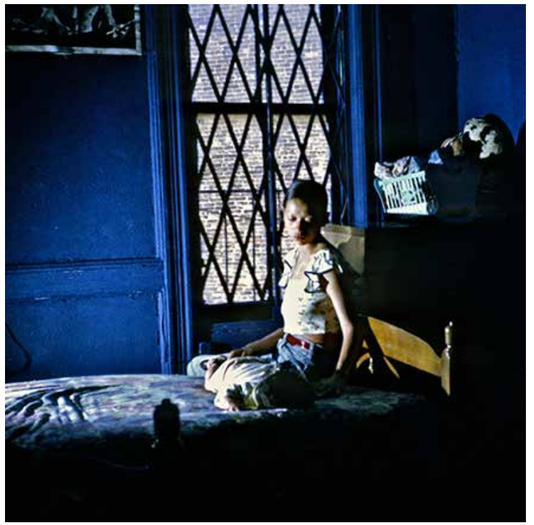
Fortress America: From Sanctuary to Siege

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

A society in which love and social cohesion have been killed—killed even among family members, as in today's polarized America—is not a pretty sight. The Church too shuns the Christian social ethic and betrays outcasts. That these outcasts then betray the Church is not surprising. Angry ghetto youths even showed up in white churches when the collection plate was passed around and forced churchgoers at gunpoint to donate to the truly love-starved.

Wherever white flight condemns our fellow citizens to ghettoization and ruin, our empty symbols of charity are left on borrowed time, their stained-glass windows broken. The Danish Seamen's Church in Baltimore, where I often found some peace of mind, had to close because Alphonso and my other friends in the neighboring houses were constantly robbing it.
A despairing minister in Chicago told me that his church was closing because the congregation was robbed every Sunday.

1973 - NYC



1973 - Bronx, NY

1973 - Baltimore

1975 - Richmond, VA

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

1974 - NYC. Homeless person outside a church

1974 - NYC. Homeless person outside a church

The High Cost of Fleeing Neighborly Love

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

In some American cities there are armed guards or police to protect guests on every floor of hotels. Subway trains in New York and Chicago carry both uniformed and plainclothes cops—and still people are murdered and raped before the eyes of panic-stricken passengers. Tourists return to Europe with "American neck" from continually sending anxious glances back over their shoulders. A Nigerian student I met in Philadelphia's ghetto was so panic-stricken over conditions there that she tried to be sent home "to safety" before her studies were over. Her statement wouldn't have surprised me if it weren't for the fact that she'd just lived through the civil war in Biafra.

The confinement of the underclass is dehumanizing for all. In five of the homes I lived in, there were twice armed robberies while I was there. Society spends billions to cure the ill instead of educating us about the suffering our racism inflicts on ourselves.

We intuitively feel that we're digging our own graves, but, unable to do anything about it, we turn it into a trench. A manufacturer I lived with accumulated a fortune making military equipment but turned to producing alarms and teargas guns, perhaps because the country wasted so many resources exporting war that the "war on poverty" at home had to be abandoned.

The more we fight for "freedom," at home and abroad, without mutual respect, the more we cut ourselves off from freedom. The result is that many now have to live behind steel-bar fortifications. Slowly but steadily the iron curtain is closing in on America. We entrench ourselves everywhere against our outcasts. You walk into a store and find yourself inside a steel cage. The wealthy can afford to invest billions in invisible electronic fortifications between themselves and the ghetto. The more electronic rays replace trust, the more the system closes itself.

People, many of whom are trained from childhood in the use of weapons, are paralyzed with fear. Many arm themselves to death to "defend themselves against the niggers," as a suburban Michigan family told me. I don't know what is most shocking: that our children of anger feel so psychologically marginalized that they can kill for a dollar or that millions of Americans are prepared to take a human life just to defend a TV.

Even teachers are often assaulted in front of their students. My friend Jerry, mentioned in the Detroit letter on page 183, had learned not to interfere when his students sat and polished their guns in his classes. As a lecturer, I often came out to support his efforts to be a saving angel for these bleeding ghetto children. But when, after years of trying, the only student he managed to get accepted into Harvard was killed in class by stray bullets from a gang fight—just before his graduation—Jerry gave up. In 2005 he fled the US and came to me in Copenhagen.

The respite he enjoyed was short. Just three years later, gang wars broke out among the marginalized here, a development that has driven Scandinavians on the same flight from their non-white citizens.

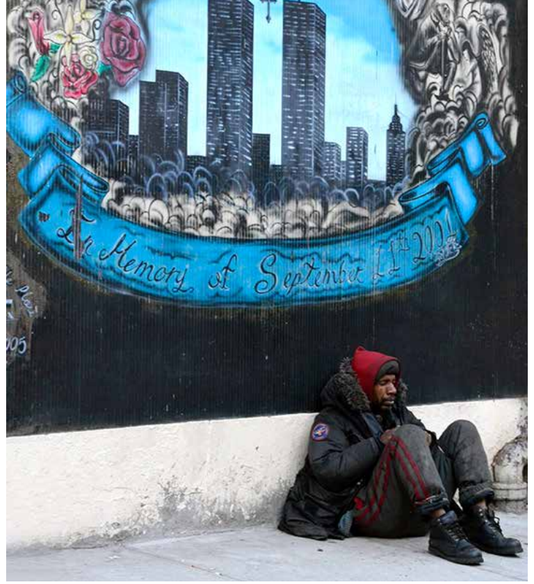
The result of more cars, guns, fortresses, and military buildups is a commensurate increase in private-industry profits and the systematic erosion of social cohesion. The more distance big business manages to create between people, the more it stifles empathy between us—and the higher the stock prices go. In the process, we slowly become more desensitized and begin to justify our gaze at, say, that woman, hungry and exposed, standing in front of the New York Stock Exchange building. As a society, we are masters at explaining and rationalizing poverty, thereby absolving ourselves of any responsibility for it.

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

2006 - NYC

2007 - NYC

2003 - Portland, OR



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1975 - San Diego, CA

1972 - Miami Beach, FL at the Republican Convention

1975 - Harlem, NY

1974 - Jersey City, NJ - Statue of Liberty

1974 - Jersey City, NJ - Statue of Liberty

1973 - NYC

The vision of a closed society: The ghetto within us

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

Attempts by the dominant caste to achieve freedom and safety often end up mirroring the desperate actions that characterize the ghetto. Just as those trapped in the ghetto seek escape in awe-inspiring luxury cars and violence, we often resort to soldiers in armored personnel carriers to confront civil unrest instead of changing the attitudes that created the ghetto.

And how free are we in "God's own country" when so many see the Statue of Liberty from behind gated windows? When, for a century, her watchful eye was blind to those condemned by Jim Crow laws? These laws were quickly replaced by Big Brother's surveillance, a direct consequence of the dehumanization built into the legal code. Wandering the United States as a vagabond just five years after the end of Jim Crow, I saw the country begin to close itself off via surveillance and plain-clothes police. I was constantly searched by police, even in the smallest towns.

Today, the situation is worse than I could ever have imagined. The racial profiling and lack of freedom in the US that I experienced over the years as a lecturer, when I drove around with my black assistant, Tony Harris, and had to show my book to anxious, armed police officers with their hands on their weapons in the dark of night to prove that we were not a threat, has turned into a huge digital dragnet. Now no explanation is necessary – because the machine has already judged you. You are not allowed to speak. You don't even know you've been monitored.

With the help of companies like Palantir, Trump's government of oligarchs is now collecting data from hospitals, schools, immigration records, welfare records, housing records—and even social media—to build massive threat profiles on ordinary citizens in AI systems.

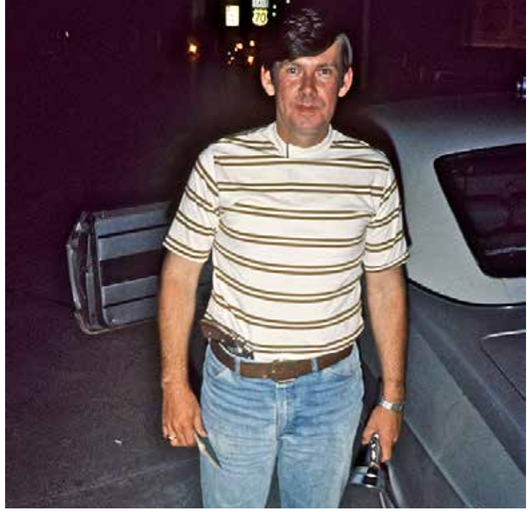
This system is not only aimed at violent criminals – it also affects parents applying for food aid and health insurance, protesters exercising their freedom of speech, foreigners seeking asylum or study permits – or my ability to give constitutionally protected lectures at universities. Using algorithms trained on decades of biased data, the state labels entire communities as dangerous long before any crime has been committed. Drones monitor neighborhoods, facial recognition marks suspects from a distance, as in totalitarian China, and cell phones reveal their owners' every move. These tools do not replace racism—they automate it. The fear that justified stop-and-frisk is now fueling a data-industrial complex that punishes especially the poor, the dark-skinned, the politically inconvenient, the undocumented, and anyone who, like me, dares to disagree. The ghetto is no longer just a place—it is a digital net cast wide over anyone who does not fit the model.

This is not just security—it is a digital caste system. One that we, the dominant caste, have created. Out of fear. Out of apathy. Not to protect freedom, but to shield ourselves from a monster we keep feeding—until it finally turns on us and takes our own freedom.

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

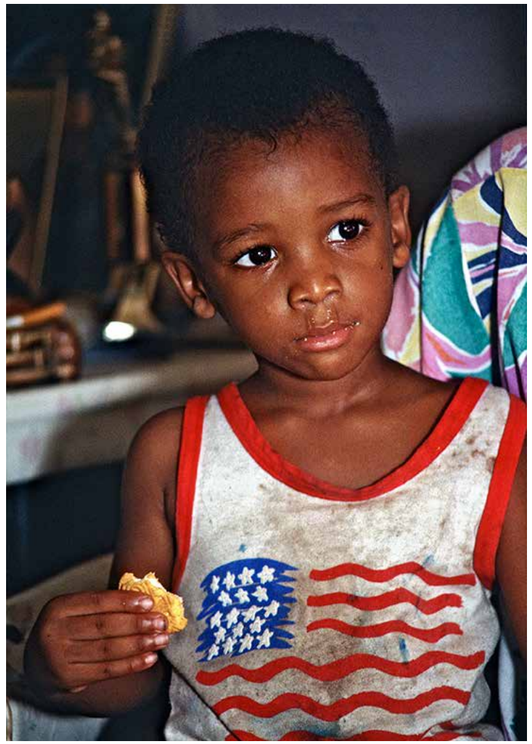
1974 - Harlem, NY

1973 - Baltimore



1974 - Richmond, VA. Plain clothes cop checking me

1986 - Amherst, MA



1975 - Philadelphia, MS

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

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

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

Two Centuries of Resistance, from Nat Turner to Black Lives Matter

1973 - Baltimore. BPP Free Breakfast Program

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

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

Yet no matter how formidable the oppression seems, there's always been an active movement to oppose it, from Nat Turner's slave rebellion to Black Lives Matter. I couldn't passively watch all this destruction, so I joined the movement of my generation, the Black Panthers. They'd already used the power of political theater at some courageous events, exercising their Second Amendment rights to carry arms while protesting the endless police killings of blacks. Whites were so scared by blacks with guns that Governor Reagan, with the support of the NRA (believe it or not), tightened gun laws in California. And even though the Panthers were otherwise nonviolent, the FBI started a secret COINTELPRO operation to smash the group, assassinating countless Panthers, some in their sleep like Fred Hampton. I was especially impressed by the Free Breakfast for Children program they set up in many ghettos, and I hitchhiked around to support them. In Baltimore I usually stayed with my Panther friends Henry and Ilane (seen here with their baby under the poster of Huey Newton). I helped them feed the local children and saw these kids, dressed in rags, walk long distances in the morning to get a meal. I felt this was more meaningful than joining the cult around the mercurial leader Huey Newton (top left), whom I'd often met in Oakland, along with other leaders, such as Elaine Brown, who sings "There is a Man" at the end of my show. But when David Dubois became chief editor of the Panther paper, he convinced me that my real role was as a photographer for the paper. I was incredibly proud of working for the son of the great W. E. B. Du Bois, seen here in the BPP headquarters in Oakland along with famous cartoonist Emory Douglass. And so the photos in this book were first published in The Black Panther.

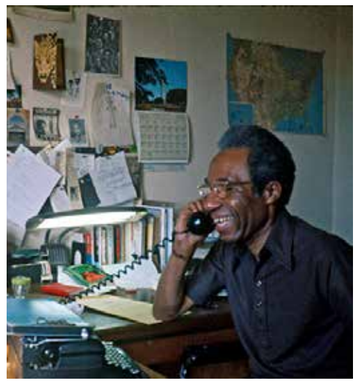
Henry and Ilane at poster of Huey P. Newton

1975 - Seattle, WA

"We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire, but we say you put fire out best with water. We say you don't fight racism with racism. We're gonna fight racism with solidarity." ...."The real danger is not that white people are going to kill us; that's a problem we can deal with. The real danger is that they will kill us and turn it into a suicide." - Fred Hampton, BPP-lader murdered by police

There's a sad afterword to this story: When I had to review the movie The Butler on Danish TV in 2013, I broke down in tears during the part in which, for the first time, the Black Panthers were portrayed positively—as a natural stage in the black resistance. I realized how I myself had suppressed my Panther involvement, which was part of my original Danish book. When I was starting up my show in Reagan's America in 1984, I erased all traces of it, afraid I'd be accused of being a terrorist. Much has changed in America—and in me—since I met Reagan in 1972, when I brazenly accused him of oppressing blacks. He was the first candidate since the civil rights movement to use "coded" racism and dog whistling ("jungle" = ghetto, "monkies" = Africans).

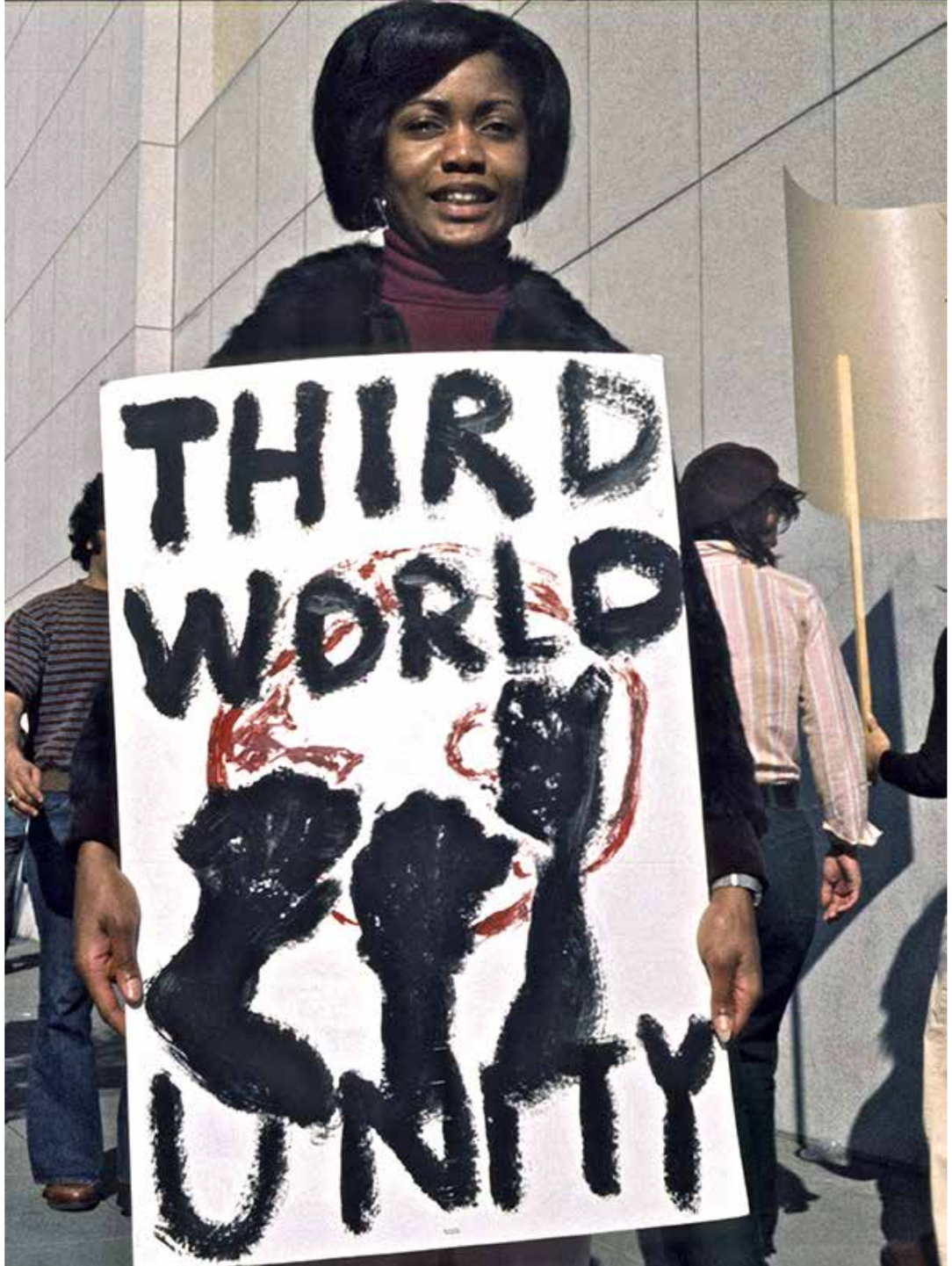
1971 - Oakland - BPP-activist Ericka Huggins

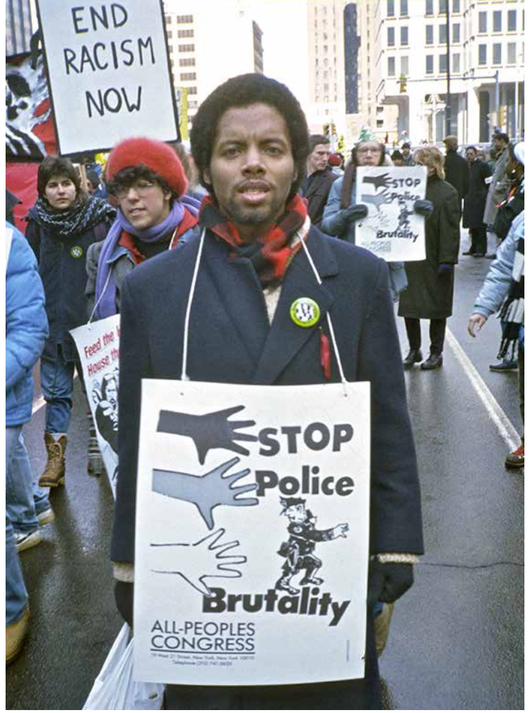


1974 - David Dubois in Oakland headquarters

1973 - Baltimore. BPP Free Breakfast

1974 -Emory Douglass in BPP headquarters





Left 1975 - San Francisco - Top 1991 - Philadelphia, PA

1987 - Ann Arbor, MI - Below: 1991 - Philadelphia, PA

Both from 1971 - Washington, DC.

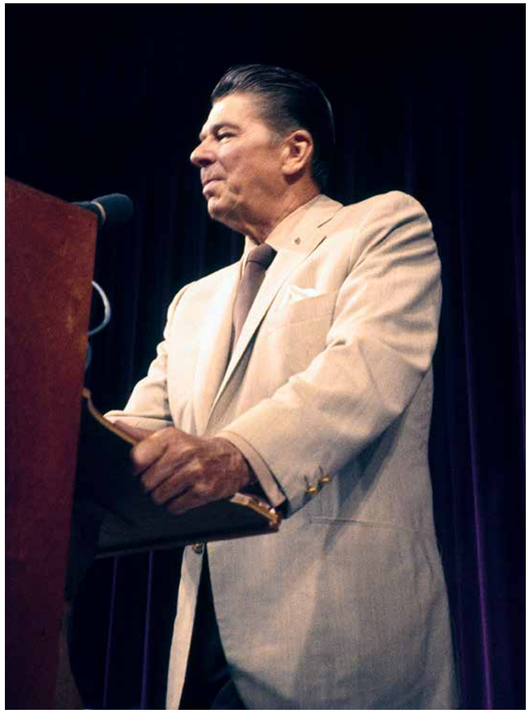
"We had to be armed because we were dealing with an armed and violent government. Our stance was a stance of defense against oppression." – Elaine Brown, Black Panther, who armed against Reagan's police, causing governor Reagan to sign gun control law

I joined blacks in countless demonstrations, from Black Panther–sponsored events up to the Black Lives Matter protests, but never saw as many blacks involved as when they arrayed themselves against Reagan's double-edged racism: He used the color-coded Southern strategy against blacks at home and supported the South African apartheid regime. He even oppressed women when advocating for dictator Zia to install Sharia law in Pakistan.

It became clear to me that blacks, like Martin Luther King, had always tried to appeal to the good in the oppressor. But during the Reagan years, I sensed in the apartheid segregation of universities that we who felt like the good guys—whites, Jews, Muslims, and immigrants alike (even black immigrants)—were like a multicultural upper caste, unconsciously contributing to the ghettoization of our stigmatized victims at "the black tables" (in the dining hall). So I shared the black frustration of demonstrating against people who, like Reagan, were basically good at heart (as his epitaph says), but whose actions still reopened historical wounds.

I am (rear right) photographing a Black Lives Matter demo in 2015 i Wash. DC

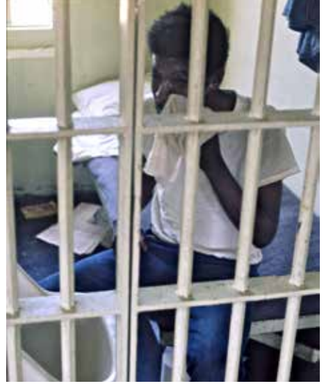
1971 - Washington, DC.



1972 - During my quarrels with Ronald Reagan, Miami Beach, FL

BLM demo in Wash DC 2015

2013 - At his memorial grave I finally found something Reagan and I could agree on - and reconciled with him



1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA

1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA

The Human Cost of Mass Incarceration

"We must face the reality that, as a nation, we have turned our backs on a new generation of children — our children — who have been locked up and locked out of mainstream society. The system of mass incarceration is slavery's second cousin once removed." - Michelle Alexander, author of The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

Oppression breaks humans far more often than it breaks patterns, and if we don't understand those who are too weak to resist, how will we ever realize how destructive our racism is?

These prisoners chose to resist not out of need or hunger, but out of uncontrollable rage—a toxic mix of hatred and self-hatred that made them despise everything. They are only the most visible symptoms of oppression, for their anger is shared by most black Americans. This anger constantly undermines their actions, causing them to stumble where others succeed. Instead of confronting the source of their anger, we place the blame for their lack of success on them.

We don't understand the ghetto monster we've created; instead, we turn our backs on it and "mass incarcerate" it in huge gulags—while destroying our own society.

My journey through this social jungle led me to prison, the most closed system of all, where I now saw the young men who five years earlier assaulted me upon my arrival in the US. Society had tightened its grip on them, and now, through my own experiences in the ghettos, I felt connected to their anger. Their "freedom" was a cruel illusion. Their choices were shaped by a system designed to oppress and control, where "the pattern of life is already set" ("Ship Ahoy"). Many black people, such as Michelle Alexander, argue that mass incarceration functions as a comprehensive system of racialized social control, eerily similar to the Jim Crow laws of the past, creating a racial caste where black people are disproportionately incarcerated and subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives (far more than were black people under South African apartheid). The "prison-industrial complex" has become a lucrative industry, where private companies and remote communities profit from the incarceration of millions of people and make perverse contributions to politicians to prolong high incarceration rates.

The system extends far beyond prison walls, affecting families and entire communities after release, with former inmates facing a "hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion." They are often denied the right to vote (to benefit Republicans), excluded from juries and legally discriminated against in terms of employment, housing, education, and public services. This system of control traps many in a cycle of poverty and criminalization, condemning them to permanent pariah status.

Previous liberal reforms that invested billions in rebuilding slums or improving education didn't dismantle this system. Instead, they only reinforced inmates' anger and sense of humiliation. That's why we liberals faltered when faced with entrenched conservatism like Clinton's "three strikes and you're out." Racism can't be bought off.

The American criminal justice system, driven by profit, works by discarding lives. Ninety-five percent of funding goes to punishment, and only 5 percent goes to paternalistic "rehabilitation." Most incarcerated people leave prison more broken than before, trapped in a cycle of shame, rape trauma, and re-incarceration. Millions suffering from the psychological scars of ghetto life—institutionalized poverty, violence, and lead poisoning—are criminalized instead of treated. As a result, black Americans, who make up only 13% of the population, make up nearly half of all prisoners and on average receive sentences twice as long as their white counterparts for the same offenses.

Alexander's portrayal of mass incarceration as a racial caste system—a continuation

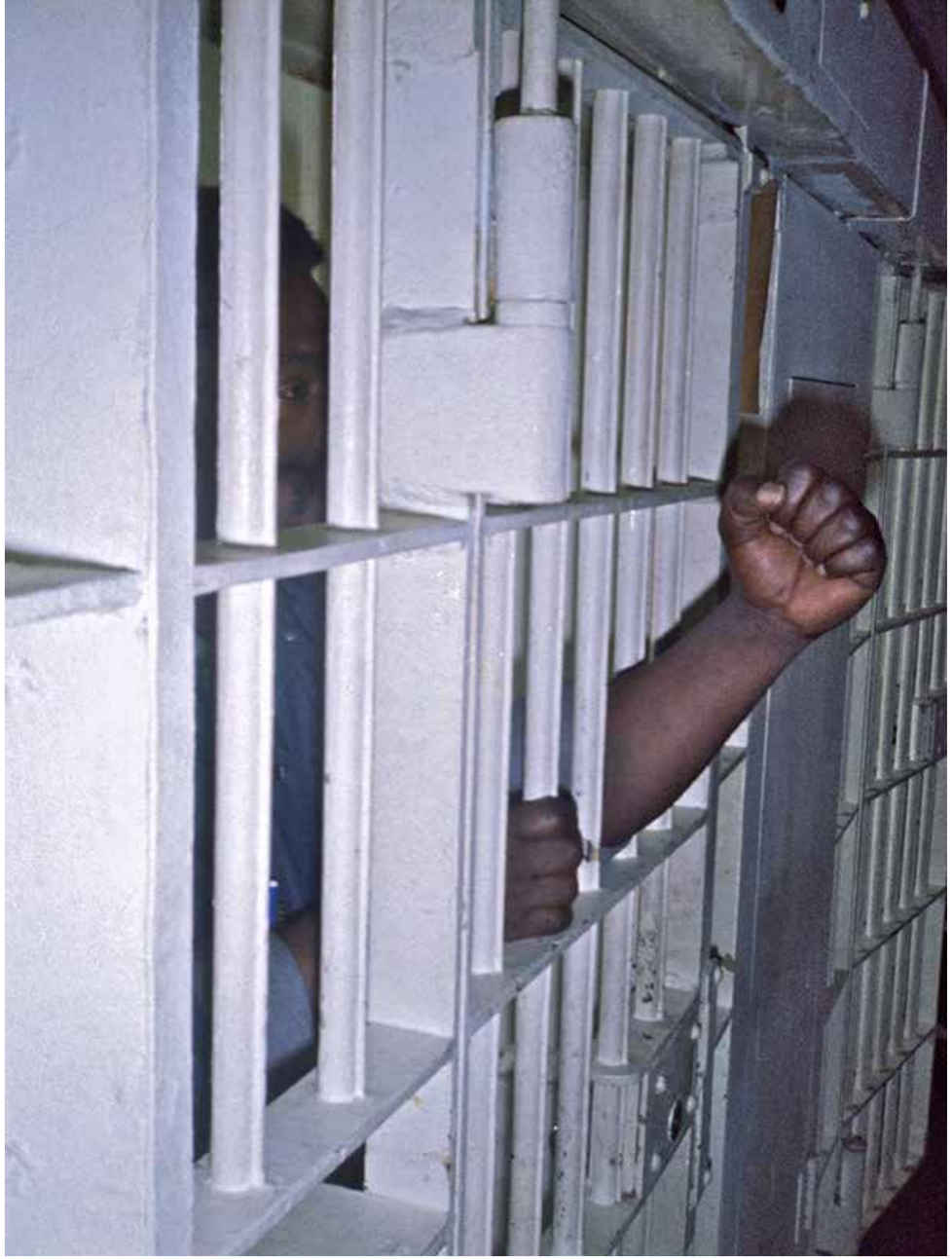
1973 - NYC - Below 1973 - Baltimore

of the legacy of slavery—resonates deeply with me. Isolated from those of us in the dominant caste, it's an elaborate system of racism that disguises itself under a veneer of "colorblindness."

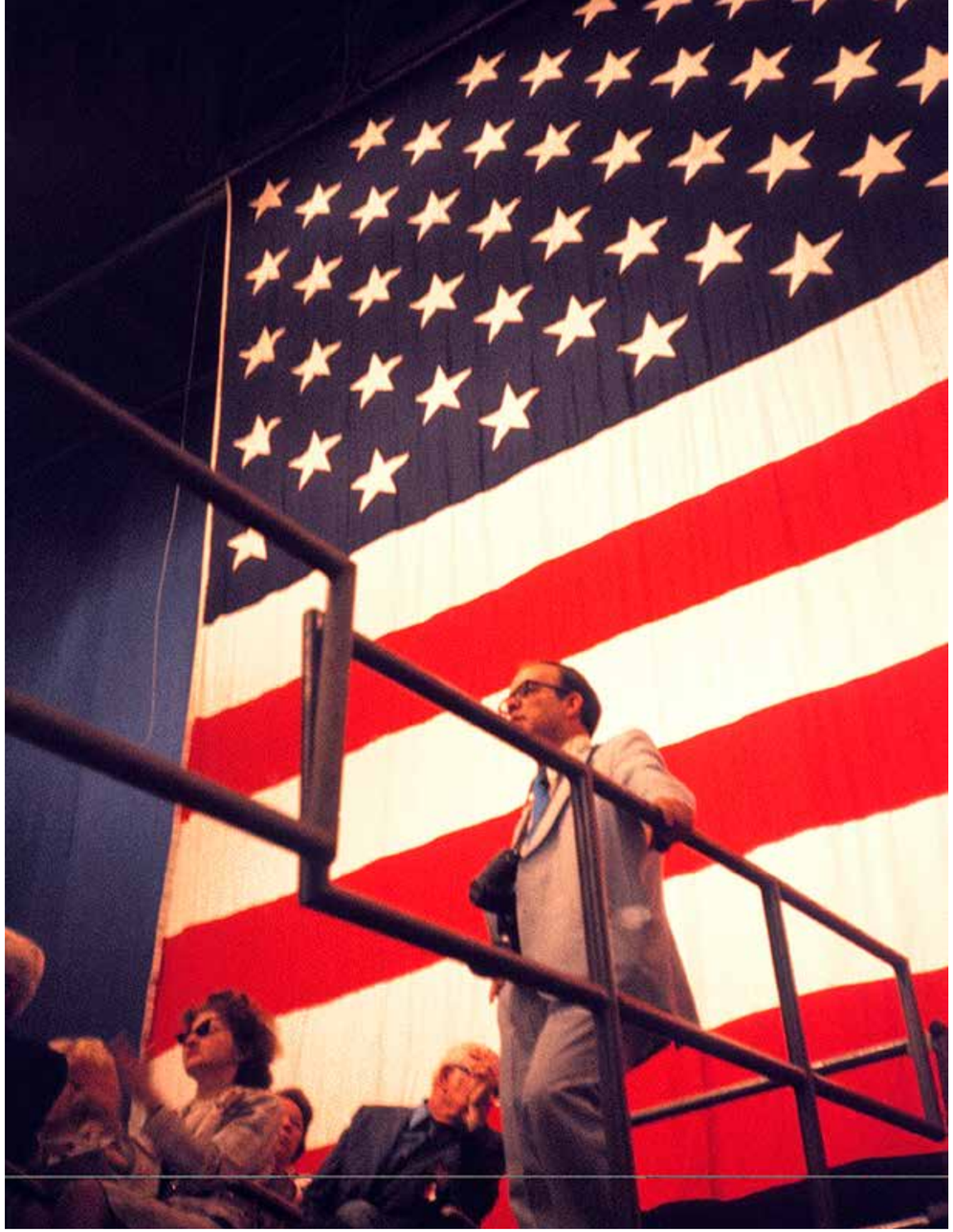
It's not just about legal reforms; the deeper question is whether we are ready to confront our role in perpetuating this oppression. How do we dismantle a system that thrives on denial? The fact that black immigrants from the West Indies are incarcerated at a much lower rate points to the lasting effects of internalized racism and systemic oppression unique to the descendants of American slavery.

If the shattered lives and apathetic faces that appear on these pages make us uneasy, it's because they reveal a truth we must confront: the horrors of this system demand collective responsibility. Until we recognize this and act, the cycle will continue and devour future generations.

1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA

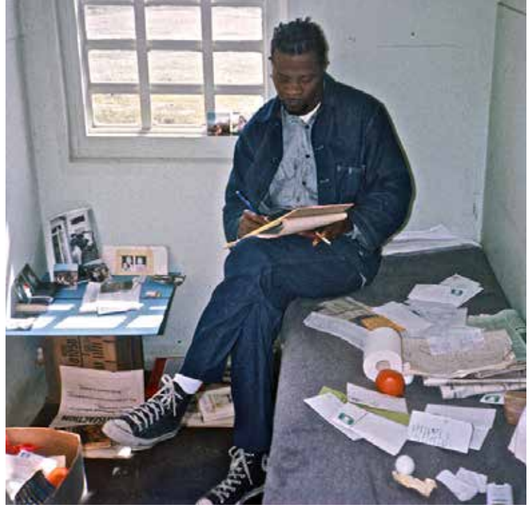


1975 - San Bruno County Jail, CA



1972 - Miami Beach, FL

1975 - Popeye in San Bruno Jail, CA



1975 - Popeye writing for the Prisoners Union Paper

1975 - Popeye in visiting room

1975 - San Francisco

From Vagabond to Activist: How Popeye Jackson Changed My Life

"The fire that burned in the '70s is still alive in our hearts and minds. We are the children of the movement, and we will carry the torch forward." - Brittany Packnett Cunningham, activist during police murder in Ferguson, MO

"The movement for Black lives is not new. It is as old as America itself. We are carrying the torch of those who came before us, and we will continue to fight for justice until Black lives are truly valued." —Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

Thanks to their constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and resist (in an increasingly unfree world), many US citizens see America as the freest of all societies—despite its barred windows and deserted streets. A book like this will be greeted with open arms because the system is so massive in its oppression that all criticism is lost upon it, and it becomes entertainment or religious escape.

Only when the system meets organized resistance does it come down on you hard, as I saw with my best friend in California, Popeye Jackson.

By the time I met Popeye, I'd reached the end of my journey. As a vagabond I loved the freedom to lose myself in the individual person and naively believed I could keep myself free of racism. But now I began to feel that my vagabonding had been a privileged white flight—like so many others. The conceptual framework I'm using here had become a necessary hope as well as a means of survival in a world of oppression, but I now realized that there were other truths and more spiritual ways of perceiving human life. I felt that I was exploiting the suffering with my camera, and, sensing my own growing racism, it was beginning to make me sick. It's not pleasant to discover you've become what you're struggling against, but racism in a racist society is neither voluntary nor individual, and I knew I was more than just a racist. So rather than feeling ashamed, my racism made me feel part of America, and I had to take responsibility for it by becoming an active antiracist and helping to change the country I'd come to love. The more I loved America, the harder it was just to silently observe its self-destruction. While I'd taken photos, dozens of my friends had gone off to prison—friends who'd protested the system, many without thinking about it—while I'd been thinking and snapping away with my camera without acting.

So I put my camera away and began to work with Popeye. He proved to me that the victim, far from being helpless, is capable of resisting. He was proud of his lower ghetto background and always dressed like a hustler. He was the personification of the underclass, with all its openness, violence, sexism, beautiful culture, generosity—all the things we in Europe consider stereotypically American. Popeye had himself been on a long journey. He was only 10 years old when he first went to jail and spent a total of 19 years in prison. During his long confinement, his political consciousness matured, and he felt that through Marxism he could free himself of the intensified self-hatred imprisonment usually induces.

He didn't want Marxism to be just an intellectual escape or a purely analytical system, as it is for so many European students, so he began organizing the other inmates into the United Prisoners Union (UPU), later becoming its president. He felt it was possible to escape the ghetto only by collectively changing the entire system. He quickly became a well-known figure and was, for instance, chosen as a mediator between the Hearst family and the Symbionese Liberation Army, the terrorist group who kidnapped Patricia Hearst.

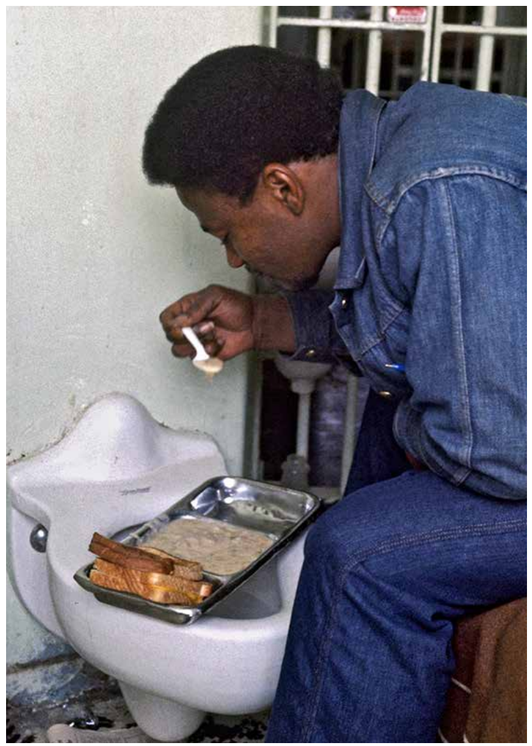
Popeye's influence on prison inmates increased, and I was told the police had tried to get him back in prison by planting dope in his car (on occasion they'd also threatened him with death). Working together in the UPU, we became more and more closely bound to each other. Noticing the big holes in my shoes, he gave me a pair of boots without a word. Though I'd stopped taking photos, he persuaded me to take these pictures for the prison newspaper. I promised never to tell how I smuggled the camera in, but since Sheriff Hongisto, probably a closet gay, is now dead, I feel free to reveal it was Hongisto who "jailed" me out of appreciation for my work in the gay movement.

Popeye constantly tried to organize the inmates under inhuman conditions that stifled all private life in a place where the system used almost any means to break people down. Precisely because I myself was totally paralyzed in these surroundings, seeing how Popeye got the other inmates to read political literature, even though it was impossible to imagine how anyone could read amid the ominous noise and ever-present fear, made an indelible impression on me. Many inmates told me that Popeye had had a similar effect on them—he wasn't a "fake intellectual revolutionary"; he was one of their own.

Although an extremely promising organizer, Popeye was naturally not without severe human failings that disturbed many of the volunteers in our group, particularly the women. They'd learned a lesson from the naive Left of the '60's, which had romantically embraced a number of rapists as the "avant-garde of the revolution." Some of them left our group because of Popeye's sexism. I clashed intensely with them because I felt their views were just another form of racism—an up-to-date radical way of saying: I don't like the underclass.

"If you think a man can come out of 300 years of slavery and 19 years of prison as an angel, you are fools. Even Martin Luther King was sexist," Coretta King says today." Back then, I said, "If you think a man should be denied a powerful leadership role until he lives up to white liberal norms in every respect, then you're as dangerous an enemy of affirmative action as the worst Southern racist. If you turn your backs on Popeye now, then it's not their racism forcing him back into a ghetto, but yours." Having myself ended up in the sexist trap (page 274), I was a great defender of Popeye. But I was also betraying him at the same time: Just as whites don't put enough pressure on each other's racism, I and the other men in the group didn't try to change Popeye's sexism, if only to allow him to be a more successful organizer.

All from 1975 - San Bruno County jail, CA



The TV news announcing Popeye's murder in my slide-show

Intersectional struggles: Racism, sexism and the nonviolent struggle for liberation

"No justice, no peace. We chant it, we scream it, we live it. We cannot live in a country where Black people are hunted and killed with impunity." —Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act." - George Jackson, prison activist killed by police

Outside the prison an effective campaign was started to get Popeye released, and at long last he was freed. We threw a big "back in the world" party for him. Popeye had often warned me about FBI infiltrators posing as members of the UPU. Having always trusted everybody I met in my vagabonding, I took his warnings as normal ghetto paranoia. I had difficulty imagining anybody I knew being secret police, so I was knocked completely out when I experienced the terror the system used against Popeye's union: One of my friends—indeed, the one in whom I had the most faith—was an FBI informant.

Her name was Sara Jane Moore. She was a bit older than the others, and we thought she was a nice, sympathetic, though slightly confused, housewife from the suburbs. It shocked us when she confessed to the newspapers that she was a spy for the FBI but now had pangs of conscience—during our work she'd been converted to Popeye's views.

1975 - Popeye at our "back in the world" release party

Two months later she almost changed world history when she attempted to shoot President Ford in Union Square. She experienced such terrible torment over what she'd brought about with her FBI work that she wanted to take revenge on the FBI by assassinating the head of the system, as she said.

Billy, a neighbor in the building where I lived with transvestites, knocked the gun out of Sara Jane's hand and saved the president's life. The act earned him an invitation to the White House. But Billy was dating the leader of the gay movement, Harvey Milk's lover, Joe, and the White House rescinded the invitation when Milk made him openly confess he was gay. (In 2007, after 32 years in prison, Sara Jane was released, and I was contacted by film and TV companies that wanted to use my pictures of her).

What had happened between these two episodes that could throw her so off balance? Saturday night, a couple of days after our party, Popeye was supposed to come over to select the prison pictures for our paper. He called up, however, and said he didn't have time; he had a meeting to go to. I said I'd come to the meeting later and drive home with him. Only two hours before I was set to leave, I got a phone call from Annie, crying in fear and begging me not to go home with Popeye. If I hadn't received that call, I wouldn't have been watching the TV-news the next evening:

"This is the Sunday edition of the eleven o'clock Eyewitness News. The San Francisco Police continue their investigation into the execution-style slaying of prison reformer Popeye Jackson, who was head of the United Prisoners Union. Jackson was sitting in a car with Sally Voye, a school teacher from Vallejo, when the shooting took place at 2:45 Sunday morning. Police say they died immediately.

- Now, like many of you, I love dogs. I am concerned about them. That's why I feed my dogs Alpo. Because meat is a dog's natural food. That's what they love most. And Alpo's meat dinner has beef products that are really good for them. Not a speck of cereal. Not a better dog food in the world.

(Police): Reports indicate that the killer first fired a shot that smashed a window of the car. The first bullet hit Miss Voye and then Jackson. The gunman was not there to rob the people. Wallets were intact.

This sounds like an execution-style slaying ...

- You could call it that. We're working on that as a possible theory. We have to rule out robbery.

- Police say a number of people went to their windows when they heard the shots. Police will begin questioning them tomorrow to find the killer.

- Here's how it starts. You see someone take that first mouth-watering bite and you've just got to get a taste for yourself. In this world there's only one fried chicken that always tastes so finger lickin' good, and you've got to say "HEY! It's a Kentucky Fried Chicken day!"

"The revolution will not be televised." —Gil Scott-Heron

"The revolution will not be live-streamed. The revolution will be in the streets. The revolution will be in the communities. The revolution will be in our hearts." —Alicia Garza

1975 - Local TV News next evening

Farewell to Yet Another Friend — Flawed, yes, but fighting a System Dehumanizing Us All

"It's time for us to humanize the narratives of Black people. We've been dehumanized in this country for too long." —Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter

"The function, the very structure, of racism is to dehumanize people. And how can you negotiate with a dehumanized enemy? You can't." —James Baldwin

Although it was my best friend I saw lying in a pool of blood on TV only a few hours after I myself had planned to drive home with him on that disastrous night, I was unable to cry the first four days—it all seemed so unreal to me, presented, as it was, in this strange American mix of dogfood and fried-chicken commercials. The system, with the media at its disposal, can get away with just about anything since it's capable of making us forget in the next instant what we saw in the previous one.

What had happened didn't dawn on me until the funeral, and I broke down totally in tears. I'd also come to realize that Sally, who'd worked with prisoners and ghetto kids though she lived in the safety of a suburb, who'd even tried to work on Popeye's sexism, and whom I'd liked, this fantastic woman had also been murdered—simply because she would've been a witness to the assassination. My destiny would've been no different had I been with them that night.

Here's Sally with Popeye a few days before their murder. The assassin has never been established. But since Sara Jane Moore, sentenced to life in prison, gave Playboy a harrowing account of her undercover work for the FBI, including how the FBI threatened her life when they realized she was being won over by Popeye's ideas, few of us have any doubts. Popeye had often warned me of ex-convicts who might've struck early-release deals with the police.

He himself was never afraid of dying in spite of the fact that, as the San Francisco Chronicle later revealed, police had threatened to kill him. In his last article, which he wrote while I was with him in prison, he said: "We ought not to fear death. We are the convicted class and only through revolution can we win our freedom and the freedom of all oppressed people in the world."

At the funeral, where I was the only photographer invited by his family, many of his union workers and prison friends—Indians, blacks, Chicanos and whites—kissed him farewell. Many others wouldn't be able to get "back in the world" and see his tomb until a generation later. His mother, who'd brought him cake in prison every single week for 19 years, suffered a total breakdown in front of the coffin.

San Francisco Examiner

Few assassination clues

Who killed 'Popeye' Jackson?

SLA jury's 11th day-- no verdict

Livermore street gala ends in riot

CIA called a danger to the people

Rocky's report

Ford takes to TV in furor over CIA

1975 - The Hearst-papers SF Examiner

'Popeye' Jackson-- who executed him?

By Larry D. Hatfield

'POPEYE' JACKSON

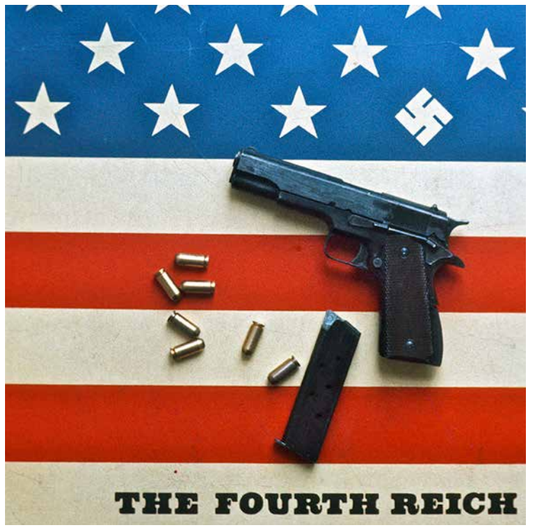
SALLY VOYE

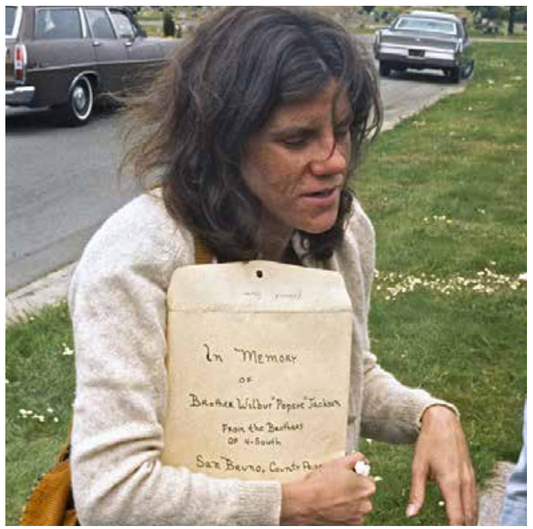
and SF Chronicle

1975 - Popeye at our party

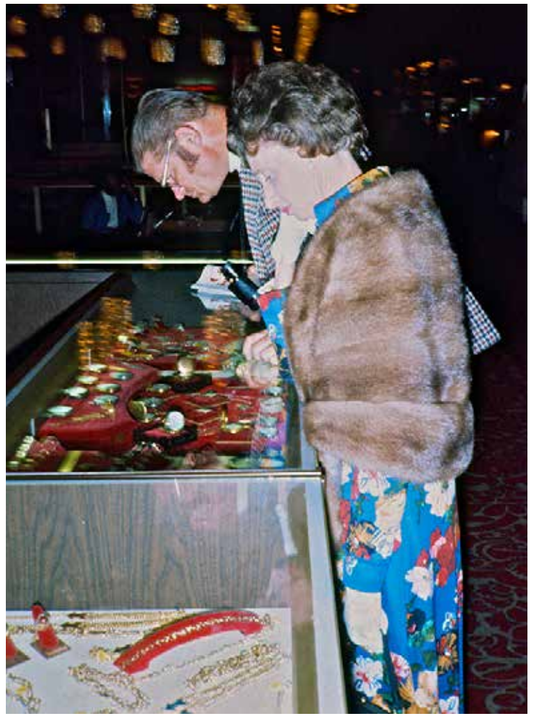
1975 - UPU member "Sleepy" at the funeral

1975 - Popeye and Sally Voye at party



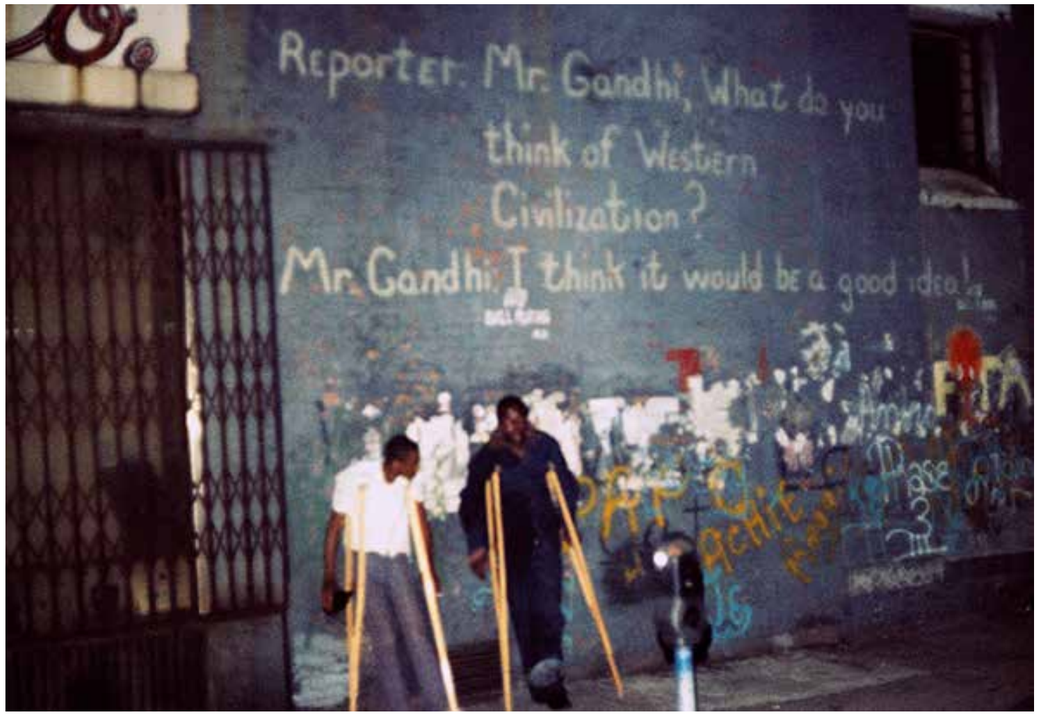


1975 - Popeye's pregnant wife Pat Singer at funeral



1975 - guests at 5000$ a plate fundraising dinner for President Ford

1975 - Ex-convict saying goodbye



1971 - Two Veterans at Gandhi memorial, Lower Eastside, NY

There is a man
who stands in all our way.
And his greedy hands
reach out across the world.
But if we slay this man
we will have peace in this land
and this glorious struggle
will be done.

And what we want is just to have
what we need
and to live in peace with dignity.
But these few old men,
no they won't break or bend
so it's only through their death
that we'll be free.

And if we dare to fight
for what, for what we want
sparing none
who are standing in our way:
The fight is hard and long
but we can't, we can't go wrong,
for our liberation will be won.

And we can meet again
if we do not die
for that is the price
that might be paid,
But if we pass this way
we shall meet some day,
we shall meet again
if we do not die ...

Elaine Brown, Black Panther Chairman, seen her speaking in 1973 - Oakland, CA

Listen to the song here by Elaine Brown illustrated in my slideshow

1971 – a corpse opposite Gandhi's memorial wall

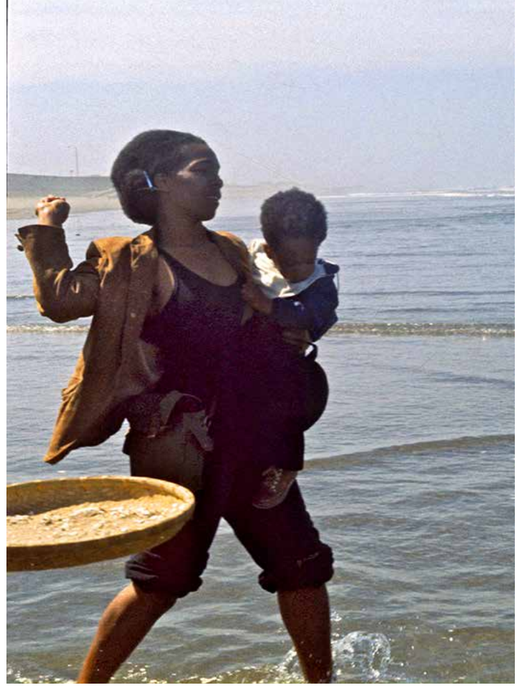
Reluctant Farewell to America—a Country I Had Come to Love

"Sometimes you have to give up on people, not because you don't care, but because they don't care." —Tupac Shakur

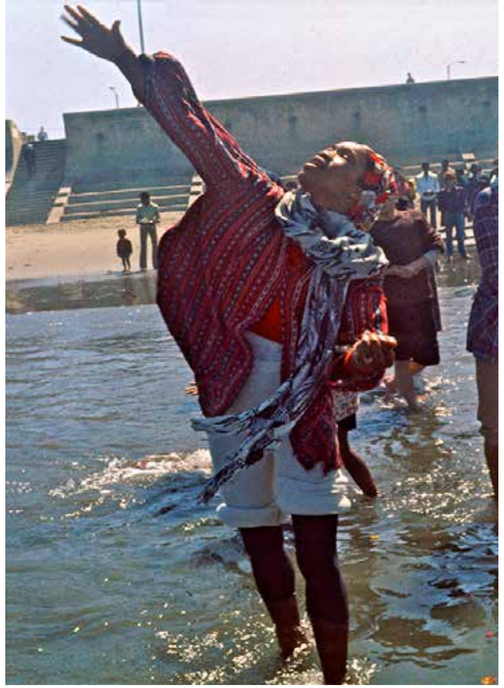
Popeye was the last friend I wanted to say goodbye to in this way. With the murders of Sally and Popeye, all my feelings and senses had been killed. I couldn't take it any longer and fled the country. I'd lost 12 of my best friends to this senseless American violence, and numerous others had disappeared into prison for life.

This man was murdered in New York near where I lived, right across from a ghetto mural (behind the shroud), which he perhaps never paid attention to, perhaps was unable to read. Late one evening, at the same wall, we find two crippled veterans who've been out defending "Western civilization" and now have to beg in the streets.

"I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually." — James Baldwin



1975 - San Francisco. Linda Jones throwing ashes in the ocean



1975 – San Francisco. Rhodessa Jones throws away the ashes. The following year, she saw herself in my slide show in Copenhagen

"O, let America be America again—The land that never has been yet—And yet must be—the land where every man is free."
—Langston Hughes

I end my first trip to the US with some of my original tear-filled pathos from the slideshow:

I loved the American people more than anything I had ever known. I eventually wanted to become a part of it and had no intention of leaving.

The human warmth I'd everywhere encountered—the same warmth with which other immigrants had been welcomed with open arms—was a fresh breeze in my life after the detachment and reticence I'd known in Europe. But the warmth and openness of Americans stood in glaring contrast to the cruel and inhuman ghetto system, which, it must be said, had grown out of their own unacknowledged pain, itself a result of injuries sustained in childhood or later in their lives.

I'd been on the highest peaks, and I'd been in the deepest shadowy depths, with one foot in the grave of America. It hurt me to see, everywhere, the increasing ossification and fortification of this openness and warmth, a warmth that most foreign visitors still feel liberating but which, long ago, had petrified into fear, hatred, and bitterness toward other Americans. Americans are so alienated from each other that they no longer even dare to talk about politics and race in their families. Or, in this cold civil war, they isolate themselves in echo chambers—in neighborhoods with like-minded people.

So the violence, against oppressed peoples everywhere, continues. With our climate racism, combined with unfair trade policies, we kill or drive millions of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people to our shores as refugees. But how many are we prepared to turn away because we fear a deeper change in ourselves, one that would benefit our children and the world as a whole?

Yet another child has been killed in ghetto violence (five years old). The ring is closing. Once again a black mother must throw her child in the ocean, as she did from one of the slave ships of 500 years ago ... the lifetime of our ghetto system ...

The ocean shall lead her back to the shores her ancestors came from when we needed them. How much more suffering are we going to witness—or cause? We don't know. We throw our uncertainty in the ocean with the ashes of our victims ...

The end of the slideshow with *Ship A'hoy* by The O'Jays

Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy!
As far as your eye can see,
men, women and baby slaves,
coming to the land of Liberty,
where life's design is already made –
So young and so strong
they're just waiting to be saved ...

The End? - From Oppression to Empathy: A Journey Toward Healing

The end of my slideshow

"Forgiveness is the willingness to give up the hope of a better past. " -Toni Morrison

"History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again." -Maya Angelou

"We are all interconnected, and the pain of one becomes the pain of all. We must learn to heal together, or we will all suffer." - Yaa Gyasi

"Healing begins where the wound was made." - Alice Walker, The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart

"If we're gonna heal, we gotta feel. And we can't heal if we're afraid." –Beyoncé

American students were asked to write down their feelings after five hours of "reverse oppression" in my slideshow, i.e., of having their self-image as decent and morally responsible consistently contradicted. These are typical results:

Guilty, paranoid, frustrated, drained, upset, numb, tense, angry, pissed, silenced, dumb, confused, unworthy, cautious, inferior, powerless, fearful, meek, passive.....

Further oppression could also have made you... protective, inattentive, hostile, turned off, shrewd, playing games, deceitful, plotting, manipulative, retaliatory, superior, observant (of the oppressor), crafty, destructive, detached, cagy....

These are almost the same sentiments expressed by most blacks living under patterns of oppression in the US and South Africa, by Muslim immigrants in Europe, by Palestinians living under Israeli domination, and to varying degrees by many other oppressed people—often ending with VIOLENCE.

The pain, anger, and sadness that summarize these feelings force people into paralysis, into hopeless and self-consuming anger. The irrational and impotent behavior that results further reinforces the racism of the oppressor. The sudden realization of how this vicious cycle works motivated many of the university students to work together to break these oppressive patterns. Many felt the urge to cry and to share their feelings. Sharing our feelings and deep concerns about racism in constructive dialogue, I feel, is a meaningful first step toward breaking out of the fears and inhibitions that keep us locked into harmful patterns.

Many readers of the same texts in this book will undoubtedly be opposed to systemic racism, the sum of all our individual racisms, but will hopefully also take the step of confronting their own racism in the same way.

Of course, oppressing people into a new way of thinking in order to liberate others is not my own idea. I was inspired by, and benefited from, the progressive government programs that Gunnar Myrdal, another Scandinavian, gave rise to with his groundbreaking work, An American Dilemma. For years after the civil rights movement, the US government sought to change oppressive white thinking because, as Myrdal rightly pointed out, only the reduction of white prejudice would reduce oppression and lead to upward mobility for blacks. In other words, it was necessary to forcibly initiate the upward spiral of oppression.

One beneficiary of the progressive government programs was my mentor, Dr. Charles King, whom the government employed in his "White people must change" seminars for employees in the military, CIA, FBI and many other government institutions and large corporations such as IBM, Federal Express etc. The idea was that only by deprogramming the divisive racism of whites could their unified power "make America strong again." After having seen my show Charles King invited me to participate in his seminars as a neutral observer, "I will not treat you like the others", he said beforehand and placed me at his side without telling me anything about what was going to happen. Then he started abusing, dividing, scolding, accusing, oppressing, and pitting his participants against each other for two days while showing them how this was similar to what happens to blacks. As a white I felt he went too far and felt pity for these highly educated and fair-minded participants who had agreed with their employer not to escape his program—although we all at times felt tempted to do that. With his formidable insight in black and white psychology I saw him gradually break down these powerful leaders, so they ended up behaving and answering almost "like children." He knew exactly what he was doing. He started the first day by just asking their names – nothing more – and then wrote something on a small piece of paper with their names on and put it in a box. After two days of oppression, he asked each of them to come up and read aloud the predictions he had written about how each of them would react to his oppressive behavior, how some of them would withdraw into a shell, how others, "the militants," would fight back at first, and all the other escape roles people under oppression typically end up in. In the end he asked them all individually to write down the feelings they now had, and I was amazed how similar they all were – also to mine (if only because I had not been prepared for his oppression). Then he ended by saying that "those are the exact same feelings we blacks go around with every day because of white racism. ....But now I will stop oppressing you, I promise. ....Do you trust me?" Of course, in our brokenness and after many such short-lived moments of seeing light at the end of the tunnel, none of us trusted that our great oppressor would ever change, even if he "withdrew his knife from 4 to only 2 inches into our backs." But he finally did change and ended the two hectic days by throwing a true liberation party afterwards with plenty of "Black and white Scotch blended whisky" during which I have never seen such gratitude pouring out toward a human being. Everyone felt that he had lifted them into a new and freer thinking. I myself had felt miserably lonesome during the whole emotional trial since the others now admitted that they had felt I was a spy or ally of Charles King even though in so many ways I was shocked experiencing how my inner emotional reactions had been similar to theirs – both those of the white and the black participants. As an outsider I was therefore incredibly proud when in the end he introduced me as "the only modern-day John Brown." So in the years after, I often took my students with me on excursions to Harper's Ferry where John Brown had started his abolitionist insurrection.

Charles King was the first to make me realize that the emotions people had after his oppression were the same as those of people going through American Pictures, and this was one reason I ended up stretching the experience of it over two days. His powerful approach, however, was unsuccessful on college campuses since students contrary to his normal government employees were not forced to be "locked up" during his oppression therapy and would soon seek escapes, including walking out. Luckily the mixture of powerful images and music made my students "captive" and "shell shocked" for five oppressive hours, after which they were committed to a second day of healing liberation—during which they usually were totally quiet during the first couple of hours, but then—especially under the impact of my black assistant, Tony Harris—would gradually start opening up and end in the first deep black-white dialogue they'd ever had on campus. Soon, they would be in such a happy exchange of feelings with each other that they did not need us there any longer—and Tony and I would quietly sneak out and go to the next campus the same evening to start the whole program again. Usually, they would bring us back within a year to their "American Pictures Unlearning Racism" groups, but often I didn't hear about what came out of our oppression/healing programs until 20 years later when these students met again to evaluate how

1986 - With Dr. Charles King after one of his workshops - hear him below

1991 - With my mentor on his deathbed in Atlanta a few days before his death

Left Dr. Charles King's workshop
Right my own workshop in U.Penn 1991

Centered around Zindzi Mandela in our Ubuntu House we are celebrating the humanity we share across all ethnic, religious, sexual, and national borders

American Pictures had changed their lives and they wanted us to come again.

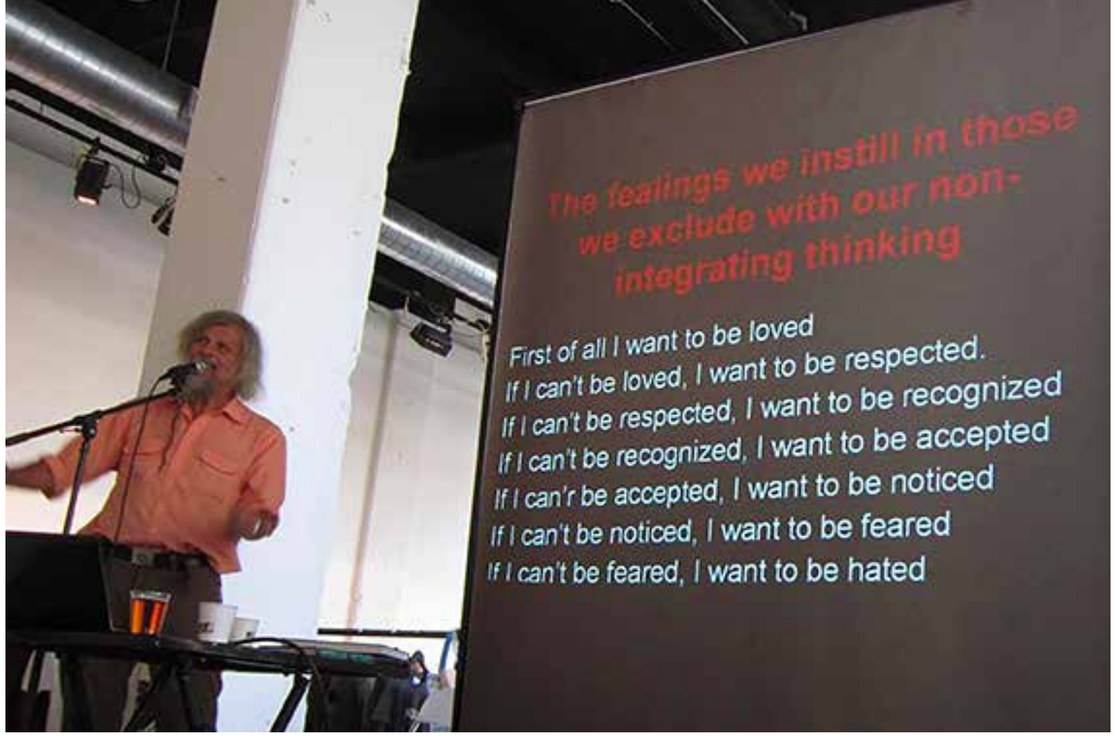
So "oppressing" us to confront us with our deeper oppressive thinking about each other and to bring us together in dialogue—at eye level—is the only effective way I've seen for healing and combatting racism. The process is used in various forms by countless other anti-racism counselors whose workshops I have experienced over the years. The only method that I think is more effective, if you have the opportunity to do so, is to move in with those you feel prejudice against. That I saw whenever I brought students or foreigners or even KKK members with me to stay with the people trapped in our ghettos and meet them on their own terms. Soon they would unlearn their fear and guilt patterns, which is difficult in the safe surroundings of an intellectual university setting. And in the process, they likewise helped the ghetto dwellers unlearn many of their deep-rooted anger and hostility patterns.

When, after a couple of years, I learned, through the loving help of others, to overcome my fear and distrust of fellow citizens and saw how they now opened up to me, I one day found this poem by Nis Petersen and felt challenged to try to open up further and trust those who still fueled my fear of people. I illustrated it with my photos and carried it with me everywhere as an inspiration. Years later it became the introduction to all my lectures ...
"On saying yes to those we shun."

With love Jacob Holdt

Patron of the Ubuntu House, Zindzi Mandela, daughter of Winnie and Nelson Mandela

Left: See Zindzi Mandela speak in the Ubuntu House on Women's day
Right: See my farewell speech to her shortly before her death



2012 New York Photo Festival.
My lecture "On saying yes to those we shun"
Photo Susanne Gupta

Lovest Thou Man ?
Man came towards me
– heavily – painfully –
behind him the path
with slimy tracks
of lies and festering sores -.
A voice boomed: Lovest thou Man?
No! I said – I can't.
Love! Said the voice.
Man came –
nearer – crawling –
drooling of lust –
with flies and vermin
in the sores of his belly.
Hammered the voice :
- Lovest thou Man ?
No ! I said.
Love! said the voice.
Nearer – and slowly nearer –
inch by inch –
the stench was heavy
from Lie's thousands of diseases –
and the voice threatened:
- Lovest thou Man ?
- No – I don't love !
- Love! Said the voice.
Then he rose to his feet –
and he stretched his hands towards me,
and lo: the spike wounds oozed red –
the naked arms were covered to the shoulders
with black sores of sin –
and the man laughed :
– Thus did God love !
A blindfold fell from my eyes –
And I shouted :
– Mand – I love you !
And my mouth was full of blood –
the blood of Man.

In 1974, I shared her bed with 10-year-old Linda in the windowless shack

1986 - Linda driving with me during a visit

1994 - Visiting Linda the prison where she used my book for her rehabilitation

2003 - Reunion in Tampa with Linda before she went back to prison

2003 - Weeping Linda showed her son pictures of her impoverished childhood to explain why she neglected her own children

Update on Linda Jenkins from page 210-219

Linda Jenkins, the girl in the red dress, always made my audiences cry with her sincere hope that, born just days after Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, she would overcome oppression. She also gave me a vague hope that rural people would fare better in the cities. So it was depressing to revisit her family, which had fallen apart by the time I returned in 1978. The father now lived alone in a small shack (their shack had been demolished because the white landlord needed the land). He didn't even own shoes and walked five miles, barefoot, to work every day. Now an alcoholic, he talked about the happy years the family had spent together before Linda's mother was confined to a psychiatric hospital.

Linda and her brother Robert now lived with a foster mother, and she wouldn't let me talk to Linda, whom I'd hoped to take to Disney World. When American Pictures started in the United States, I and the blacks in the group had dreamed of hiring Linda, a girl of shining intelligence, to present the show, and I searched for her until 1985. Then a man in a suit came out of a black poolroom and said in a foreign accent, "I had a dream about you. God has sent you. You're looking for Linda. Linda needs you." The man, a complete stranger, took me to a "joint" in a faraway town. There was Linda, destroyed by alcohol and drugs. Although she was now 22 years old and we'd met when she was 10, she remembered me: "You're the one from Denmark," she said in a place where no one else had ever heard of Denmark.

Nonetheless, I couldn't reach her and I drove away shaken. Her anger and "internalized racism" had erupted later than in most other black children in that era. Every time I tried to reach her after that, she was either in jail for crack abuse or couldn't go with me—because of the three children the state eventually took away from her. In trying to help her, I befriended her crack buddies, such as the equally promising Inez Manns, whose children were also taken into state custody. Before making the long drive down there to look for Linda, I usually called the police: "Is she in or out?"

In 1994, after a full day of searching the area, I drove away depressed. No one knew which prison she was in now. Driving out of Alachua that night, I saw a black man walking along a drainage ditch. I stopped to ask whether he needed a ride. He said he did since he was on his way to a faraway prison to visit his girlfriend. I told him I was looking for someone whom I'd photographed when she was a little girl. Suddenly he asked whether I was from Denmark. His girlfriend, Linda, had often told him that the only friend she had was a white man from Denmark who kept coming back into her life. After driving over a thousand miles for 12 hours to see Linda, I felt it was a gift from above that I'd just picked up the only person out of the 20 million residents of Florida who knew where she was. I drove him to the prison, which made an exception for me the next day: Even though I wasn't on the visitor's list, I was allowed to visit Linda in private.

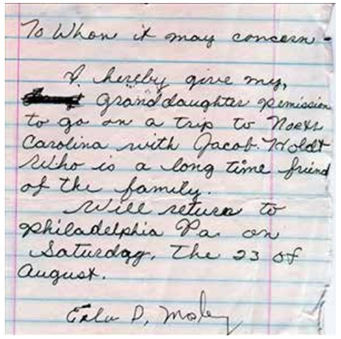
It was a moving experience. I decided to tape Linda's account of the childhood I'd romanticized in American Pictures. I managed to smuggle a small Dictaphone up my sleeve. In the past Linda would never talk about her childhood or watch my slide show about it, but after many years in prison, she was using my book in a rehabilitation program. After her last sentence (of five years), she wanted to get out of crime, but it was difficult when she only had the "swamp" to go back to. That's why she needed my help and wanted to work with American Pictures. She grabbed my hands so fervently that my guilt brought tears to my cheeks.

But years passed, and the next time I found her "free," in 2003, she was all the way down in Tampa, and police cars were circling the house where she lived with two of her sons, who were gang members. As I interviewed them, people were pouring in, buying drugs from them while paranoidly watching for drive-by shootings from other gangs. Linda told me and her sons that everything had gone wrong for her when her family broke up, tearfully saying, "I know I haven't been the best mother to you. I was on crack and in prison for many years, and I neglected you. But sometimes things happen in your life that are out of your control."

When I came home to Denmark, there was a letter from Linda: "Jacob, send money to my lawyer. Now I'm in prison with both my sons." In the same prison as two of my other old friends, Inez and Diane (page 340) –all three grandmothers. It depressed me that the person who had helped make my slideshow so successful and saw me as her only friend was the one who, in my race to professional success, I'd failed most.

Linda was last incarcerated in 2019. Her brother, however, has never been to prison.

Long interview with Linda about her childhood and talking to her son about the reasons why she became a drug addict


To Whom it may concern -

I hereby give my granddaughter Permission to go on a trip to North Carolina with Jacob Holdt who is a long time friend of the family.

Will return to Philadelphia Pa. on Saturday, the 23 of August.

Ezlu D. Mosley

1974 - Renee's grandmother wrote our "pass"

Video about how Rene and I made the nude photo and about her mother's death

1971 - My first photo of Deborah René Yates 13 years old

1974 - with Dorothy cooking in the wealthy homes around Philadelphia

1991 - Dorothy always came to my lectures in Univ of Penn - a few blocks from her ghetto home

Update on Dorothy and Rene Yates from page 442

I am often asked how I was able to take the intimate photo on page 418 (among others). Here's the recipe. Since 1971, my first year on the road, I had often stayed with Dorothy Yates, this wonderful and hospitable woman in the Philadelphia ghetto. She was poor but often worked as a cook for wealthy whites in the suburbs.

Her 13-year-old daughter, Renee, was fascinated by my vagabond stories and always begged me to take her with me (and out of the ghetto). But I felt she was too young even though at 13 she was already a mother to Michael. Well, finally, when she turned 16, I relented and said, yes, on the condition that she get written permission from her mother.

I knew all too well how the police would react to a white man hitchhiking with a black girl, not to mention the sexual harassment from white men who saw a hitchhiking black woman as a sexual object. But aside from countless sexual assaults by white men trying to throw me out of the truck, our trip went well.

In Richmond, VA, we lived with her family in the East Side ghetto, and I became friends with her cousin Willy Hunt, with whom I went out at night robbing (page 396). Willy's brother was in the hospital: Willy shot him in the head the night before and blinded him. Willy was later sentenced to 16 years in prison for other crimes but has since become a hard-working, religious family man. Like so many others we lock up in ghettos, he just had to go through a few years of youthful rage, which was when I met him.

Heading to North Carolina, we arrived in the middle of the night at the home of my playboy millionaire friend, Tommy, who'd given me the keys to his mansion. It was stifling hot, so Renee and I got used to sleeping next to each other, naked, on the floors and beds we shared on our trip, without any sexual attraction involved. So Renee didn't think twice about going completely naked into the kitchen next to our bedroom to make a cup of tea in the morning. But wow, did Tommy get the surprise of his life when he woke up to see a naked black woman in his kitchen—and loved entertaining his redneck friends with the story forever after. Even though he lived in a town that was 50% black, he'd never had a black person in his house before, let alone naked.

Tommy in my video from 2007: "Yeah, after I picked you up, I gave you a key the first day I met you.

Jacob: "I remember one time I came down, hitching with a black woman. We came in the middle of the night, and you woke up the next morning and saw this naked black woman walking around in your house...."

Tommy: "Ha, ha, yeah, I figured Jacob must be here...."

So Renee and I gained a deep intimacy with each other during our three- week trip in the South, after which I'd promised her mother we'd return home. Renee was so happy to see her boyfriend again that they jumped right into bed. And because of the intimacy we now had, she didn't think twice about my photographic presence during their sexual act. So, the recipe for such an intimate picture, which has now become a classic, is simply to invite the model on a thousand-mile trip to loosen her up a bit.

In truth, I was always more attached to her mother, Dorothy. Dorothy and her son Larry even visited us in Denmark, where I pushed her in her wheelchair around the grounds of our royal castles.

She later appeared with me on stage at the University of Pennsylvania in a film made by Danish TV, in which I introduced her to the audience:

"We are in Philadelphia, and I am amazed that I even made it to this city as a vagabond. Because I remember that we vagabonds all over the country had a joke: 'I went to Philadelphia the other day, but it was closed.' But there was one person who opened the doors for me the first time I came here, and that was Dorothy, here in the wheelchair. She opened Philadelphia for me, and—to answer one of your questions, 'How did you get into the homes of the rich?'—well, she actually got me into a lot of these rich people's homes. The reason is that for years she was a cook in these wealthy homes around here. I wouldn't be surprised if you saw her cooking at your parties out there in the suburbs. She was one of those black people who were invisible to many of you growing up. You just take them for granted when you grow up in certain affluent homes. She was a great cook, also for me as a penniless vagabond."

When the scene of her naked daughter having sex came up in my slideshow at U Penn, she proudly shouted to the thousand spectators watching: "That's my daughter! That's my daughter!"

In 2004, when I was living with the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, I got a call from Renee telling me to come quickly; her mother was dying. I drove the thousand miles as fast as I could—in one night, straight from the Klan's headquarters—to say goodbye to her on her deathbed. Dorothy was so big now that she filled two hospital beds. I was overwhelmed by tears of gratitude for my "saving angel," who'd so often sacrificed herself over the years to feed and shelter me, and in the process provided the basis for some of my best photographs.

#This story on video

1974 - Greenville, NC - René in Tommy Howard's kitchen in the morning

2008 - Philadelphia - Celebrating René's 50-year birthday with her

1987 - Dorothy at dinner in Copenhagen with my ex-wife Annie right and my pregnant wife behind

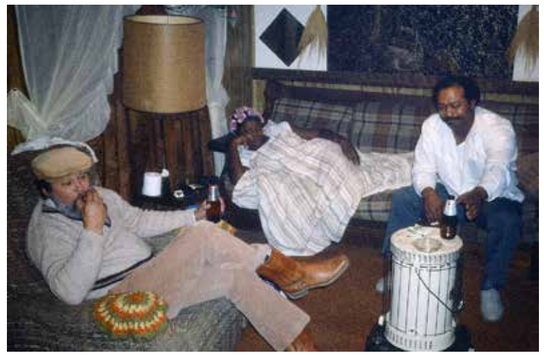
2004 - Saying goodbye to Dorothy on her death bed

Glynn, Vicky, and their children in 1985

Update on Glynn and Vicky Queen:

From antiracist hippies

to racist Trump voters



1987 - I managed to persuade the now reluctant Glynn to visit Lep and Gertrude.

The concept of time is also part of my definition of "the good vagabond". That is, to follow the people I met then through life to see how they later evolved – and in so doing, perhaps find the deeper truth they embodied. Since my images of them brought us together almost symbiotically, the mere fact that they appeared in my work has been all the more reason to revisit them throughout my life.

Once, the hippie couple Glynn and Vicky Queen had picked me up in their VW bus outside Raleigh. That was in 1973, in the years when, whenever I saw a VW van in the horizon, I knew I was always getting a lift. There weren't many hippies left at the time, but progress was a little slower here in the South. They were originally from Virginia but had both broken with their families because they were racist and now had no white friends at all because they had started hanging out with the blacks (whom I still referred to in the diary as "negroes" in 1973.) They now invited me out to their little farmhouse, which the long-haired Glynn had rented from an uncle and put a few hippie sheds on. It was to turn into a photographic breakthrough for me to discover the blacks around here in the tobacco fields. I had originally hitchhiked from the North to North Carolina to see the tobacco harvest out there in the poor eastern NC but had ended up in the more affluent Greensboro with Tony, who introduced me to so many exciting educated middle-class blacks that I was now several months late for the tobacco harvest. Typical of me to be late everywhere when I had a goal.

But I was not to regret it as Tony, with his deep insight into black and white psychology, became my lifelong and indispensable companion as a lecturer. But I wouldn't eventually have "made it" without the white hippie Glynn either. For every night all his poor tobacco-working friends would come and drink beer with him, and it was actually through these contacts that I took many of my best pictures in the "black belt" that ran from the tobacco fields there down through the cotton and sugar cane fields further down south. Pictures that would otherwise have been impossible for me to take, as hitchhiking was not an easy option on these desolate back roads. It was here I met Lep Whitley (seen in Glynn's livingroom on page 425 b.r) and his family (Lefus and Mosel page 108–19).

At the time, Glynn and Vicky were vegetarians and strongly left wing. But every time I visited them since, small changes had taken place. Even on my first return in 1978 to give my book to those I had photographed, I noticed that they had become more prosperous on their plot of land, and Glynn was now driving around with an ice cream van selling ice cream to the poor black children. And when I came to live with them in 1985 with my wife and our now five-year-old son, Daniel, they had gotten a couple of kids he could play with. Fine, but now Glynn's long hair was gone because he had a steady job, and my vegetarian wife was disappointed that meat was now on the table too.

It was through them that I found my black

1994 - Still strong as ever in his trailer

2007 - Lep without hair and without his beloved Gertrude, who had now died of cancer

friends in this vast forest area for the first few years, where they were constantly moving around to new shacks (left by white people who had moved) whenever their old ones burned down after chimney fires. So, I was shocked to discover that their black friends now never came to their house anymore. "They turned niggers on us!" replied Glynn, a little hesitantly, knowing full well that I didn't like such racist language. It began with the fact that one of their friends (Hugh, who in "American Pictures" is in bed at the top of page 184) had robbed them of everything. Hugh later served 25 years in Central Prison in Raleigh, where I never managed to visit him. Now that I had a car of my own, however, I was able to find all my black friends without Glynn's help, and I am still visiting them today. Glynn and Vicky have since grown richer and richer, eventually turning their little rotten farmhouse into a small chateau, while Lefus, and all the other blacks in the area have grown poorer and poorer. Why? Well, as Glynn told us, when in 1995 I brought Danish high school student Ulla Dalum to live with them again, because now, like the other like the other whites, he only employed Mexicans, and all the blacks in the tobacco fields had likewise been replaced by Mexicans. And now that he had only white friends and a growing arsenal of guns, he had become a mirror image of the fearful racism he had reacted so strongly against as a young hippie. He had even become the local leader of the Republican Party, dragging us along to meet his Republican friends. Here he stood over their cozy barbecues and complained to Ulla and me about all the taxes they had to pay and all the welfare the blacks get (that is, because he and his employer friends won't give the blacks jobs anymore!)

But it was good for me to live with Glynn again, for I had been raging against the Republicans for the past year over their obstruction of Clinton's policies to such an extent that they had gradually become a faceless enemy for me. And because I cared so much for Glynn and his white friends, I had the opportunity to empathize with the human being behind the depressing Republican facade in today's United States. For the transformation I have seen Glynn and Vicky and many others of my generation go through over the years paralleled the historical evolution white America had gone through – right up to Trump. Glynn died in 2012 of the hippie disease hepatitis C, but Vicky told me after the election that she had voted for Trump just as Glynn – the old hippie – would have done. Whereby they once again contributed to widening the economic gap between blacks and whites that had exploded ever since the relative equality of my vagabond years. It was this growing gap I could see so clearly every time I visited Glynn's old black friend, Lep, who wasn't even aware that Glynn still lived only half a mile from him.

In their little village, I had truly become the messenger between black and white America – the journey I had embarked on as a vagabond – but the deeper meaning of which I can only see the real value of through the passage of years.

Jacob Holdt spent five years hitchhiking 160,000 km across the US, documenting the racial divide he witnessed along the way. The result was the slide show American Pictures, which was published as a travel photography book in 1976 and barely mentioned the word 'racism'. Over the next 40 years, he toured American universities with the show, and the students' reactions made him realise that his photos documented one of the most important forms of oppression at the time. This led to 'unlearning racism' workshops, in which he learnt more about racism than he had as a vagabond. Throughout his travels, covering 2.5 million kilometres by plane and car, he also kept in touch with the friends he had originally photographed in the ghetto. Acting as a bridge builder between black and white people, he gradually gained a deeper understanding of the psychology behind the relationship of apartheid – a relationship he saw worsening in the run-up to the Trump movement. Following the Black Lives Matter movement, he had the idea for this new textbook: a testimony to 50 years of oppression and a warning to us all about how easily we end up in echo chambers — the ghettos of our hearts — if we do not actively integrate with our fellow citizens.

"What makes American Pictures so disturbingly powerful is the cumulative effects of Holdt's photographs combined with his outsider's ana¬lysis of the dynamics of poverty and oppression in the United States."
Los Angeles Times

"It is a powerful, disturbing look at a whole segment of our population that never has achieved freedom in any meaningful sense."
San Francisco Chronicle

"One could perhaps label American Pictures a "masterpiece." But "masterpiece" is a word which implies four stars in the movie section of daily newspapers. It is a word most applicable to "great" Hollywood films – those big, stupendous, melodramatic, movie spectacles that so readily satisfy our desires for illusion, passivity, and voyeurism.
Such masterpieces are soon forgotten.
American Pictures expresses a global reality and a responsibility we all share. It will haunt you for days after seeing it. It will possess you emotionally and intellectually as if it were the plague. Though this extraordinary array of American cultures may invite the label "masterpiece," such a label would obscure the power and overwhelming grip this production exercises on its viewers. American Pictures attains what "masterpieces" rarely even attempt. American Pictures challenges the viewer to act, not merely to react cathartically; to do something about the horrors of the American system. It is this seemingly immense leap from inspirational art to empirical action which American Pictures has consciously set as its goal. But what leads Holdt to admit, however, that these empirical results are impossible to measure is his awareness of the American system's enormous ability to absorb all and ability to create masks which constantly hide its horrors and injustices.
Throughout American Pictures Jacob Holdt continually questions the validity of his creation, expressing the fear that he is perhaps just another white man exploiting minorities and continuously stating that the mere representation of his experience can never equal the reality of the America he has tried to understand. The same applies here: no mere description or praise can convey the experience of American Pictures. American Pictures is a presentation that all Americans must experience for themselves.
The Chicago Reader

"I am impressed by how sharply you, as a white outsider, have been able to see and portray the oppression of the so-called 'post-racial' era of the 1970s, when all whites felt that blacks had taken their rightful place in society.
I myself would not have learned to see whites objectively as human beings if I had not lived for so many years among a very different kind of whites in France. It is one of the best interpretations of black-white psychology – especially of southerners – that I have ever seen."
James Baldwin

"American Pictures is comparable to Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. In the sense that if the story is great, it transcends time and place. After all, your pictures are an interpretation of reality. That's how Andersen saw his fairy tales. You have photographed a real reality, but the angle and the story have made American Pictures a classic.
Kathrine Lilleør, vicar, Hans Christian Andersen researcher

Flap texts in the book

Here are some examples of texts which could be used for front and back flaps