FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

BACK IN THE DAYS AND INTO THE FUTURE: DIASPORA AESTHETICS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF JAMEL SHABAZZ

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DIASPORA STUDIES

by

Noelle Theard

2010

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

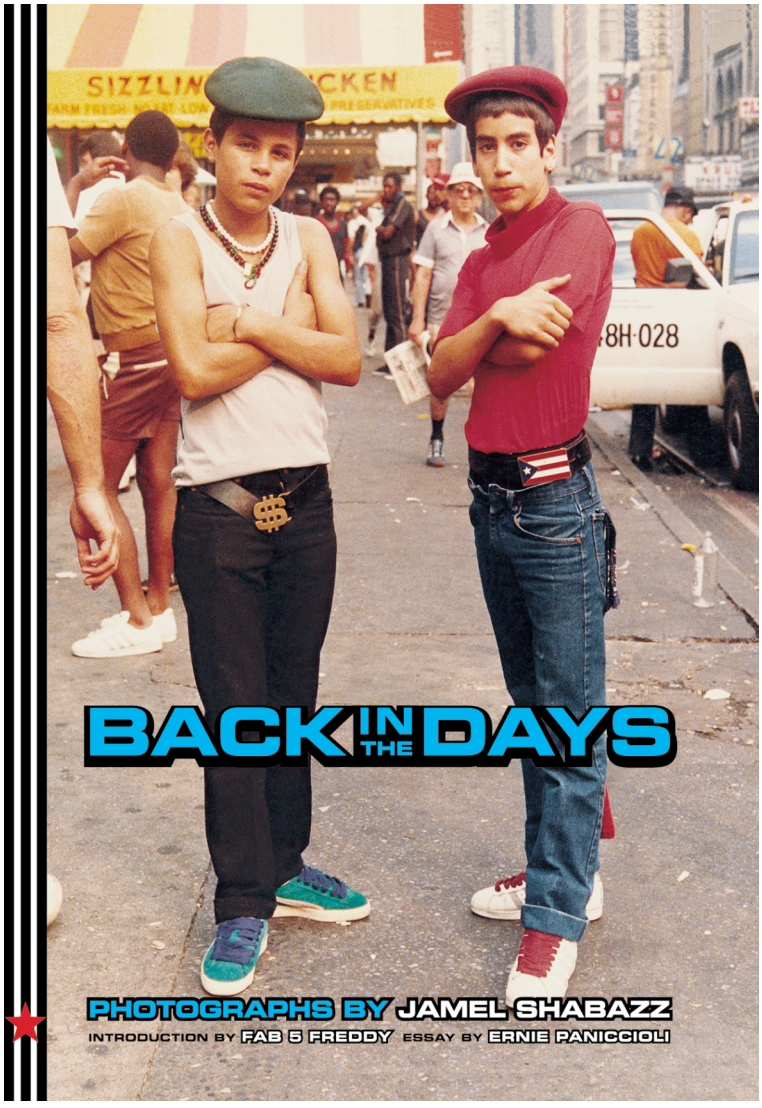
> At age nine, Jamel Shabazz was introduced to photography by his father, who kept a signed copy of Leonard Freed's *Black in White America* on the family's coffee table. Intrigued by Freed's provocative images of both Southern and urban life, Shabazz knew then it was his calling to document his community and the people who gave it life. Photography has given Shabazz a sense of purpose, allowing him to connect with the people he encounters on a daily basis. By connecting with his subjects, complimenting their style, and recognizing their potential-and then in turn publishing these images for the world at large to celebrate in a small but meaningful way Shabazz has been able to counteract the damage society can wreak on self-esteem. Having worked as a corrections officer in New York City for twenty years, Shabazz has witnessed the worst in humanity, yet he remains a humanist dedicated to preserving the legacy of our time, shooting with an eye for the future while preserving the present as a document of our collective past.[1]

This thesis engages the multidisciplinary field of African diaspora studies to contextualize the photography of Jamel Shabazz in light of four major concepts drawn from black cultural history: the black aesthetic, the black arts movement, hip-hop culture, and diaspora aesthetics.

In order to contextualize Jamel Shabazz's work, I start by exploring the foundational black aesthetic debates of the 1920s that had epicenters in Harlem and Paris. I then discuss the black arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s as an artistic, but also a

[1] Book synopsis by publisher for Jamel Shabazz 2007. Seconds of My Life. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

political project that had a tremendous influence on Jamel Shabazz's philosophy of life. Next, I explore hip-hop culture as the subject of Shabazz's photographs because he made images in 1980s New York City, when and where hip-hop was born. His photographs have become iconic photos of the era, and his books, *Back in the Days* (2001) and *A Time Before Crack* (2005) are regarded among the most dynamic records of early hip-hop culture. Now more than 30 years old, hip-hop has become a part of popular culture and a multimillion-dollar industry. The images that Jamel Shabazz made of hip-hop culture, before it was named as such, galvanized an important set of cultural tastemakers at the millennium who were looking for an "authentic" representation of hip-hop from back in the days.



Back in the Days (2001) has become his signature work, and it reflects many of the key strengths of Jamel Shabazz's photography. The subjects are proudly posed on a busy New York street, comfortably situated in the urban environment, which is Jamel Shabazz's specialty. His studio is the street, and his images are rich with historical details of 1980s New York. The two young men on the cover of the book wear dollar sign and Puerto Rican flag belt buckles, and fat laces on their sneakers. They look straight into the camera with complete confidence, participating in their own representation.

One of the most striking aspects of Jamel Shabazz's work is his portraiture – he is able to capture an essence of individuality and personality in exceptional ways, and much of this can be attributed to his approach. A dignified, confident, and humble man, Shabazz is respectful and insistent. He is a master of reading body language and carefully selects his subjects by observing them before asking them to pose for his camera.

Moving further, I analyze how Shabazz's work fits into a developing diaspora aesthetic, while explaining how his artistic practice embodies some of the key aspects of this new movement that is both global and progressive in scope. The diaspora aesthetic is rhyzomatic, decentered, and inherently optimistic, and it is beginning to steep its way into popular culture. It affirms black cultural theory but is not confined by it, and can be understood as an optimistic worldview that conceptualizes infinite possibilities. All this is reflected in the photography of Jamel Shabazz.

For this thesis, I conducted interviews, participant observation, and historical research. I did one extended interview with Jamel Shabazz in Brooklyn in May of 2008, and participated in a tribute exhibition in his honor held in New Orleans the following December, where I was one of twelve photographers invited to contribute a set of photographs inspired by Shabazz. A major influence on my own photographic practice, Jamel Shabazz is sincere, conscious, and committed to his craft. He has inspired hundreds of people in his decades-long career, including the subjects of his photographs and also the

many photographers that he has mentored over the years. This thesis presents an analysis of how Shabazz's work has engaged several important watersheds in black cultural history including the concept of the black aesthetic, the black arts movement, and hip-hop culture, while framing his work as part of a larger diaspora aesthetic movement that has captured the global imagination.

CHAPTER II

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF JAMEL SHABAZZ

Jamel Shabazz is an exceptional photographer who has spent the last thirty years creating a portrait of his people. His work reflects the dignity and pride of working class communities in New York in the 1980s. It has also captured the imagination of a new generation of tastemakers who have incorporated his work in the inter-textual, multidisciplinary, and convergent sensibilities of contemporary black popular culture. The temptation when looking at the photographs of Jamel Shabazz is to see them merely as nostalgic remnants of an era gone by—when hip-hop culture was just beginning, before it became mainstream and lost some of its countercultural power. However, the strength of the images is below the surface, beyond the fashion, and lies with the continuum of black popular culture that Shabazz has been able to manifest in his life and work. While there can be no one true representation of hip-hop culture at its inception, Jamel Shabazz has been acknowledged for capturing the essence and spirit of the movement that would change the face of popular culture. Still, his mission has always been about much more than photography. Shabazz considers himself "a street teacher and street soldier." (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

The goal of this thesis is to help readers look past the superficial understandings of Jamel Shabazz's work and accord him his rightful place as a legendary photographer, innovator, and activist who has not only documented history but become an integral part of contemporary discourse on popular culture. More than simply living through the major developments in black cultural history, Jamel Shabazz has integrated the best of each in order to sustain a photographic practice that not only serves collective memory, but also challenges mainstream representations of black culture, and inspires newer generations to be enriched by the past but not constrained by it in order to discover new possibilities for

self-expression. This continuity of cultural values is evident not only in Shabazz's photographs, but also in his mentorship, teaching, and role as a public intellectual, or what Cornell West would call a "critical organic catalyst."

> Prophetic critics and artists of color should be exemplars of what it means to be intellectual freedom fighters, that is cultural workers who simultaneously position themselves within (or alongside) the mainstream while clearly aligned with groups who vow to keep alive potent traditions of critique and resistance. (West 1993: 216)

Transcultural Renaissance and Diaspora Aesthetics

The millennium in New York City was a time of empowerment and creativity for young artists, writers, photographers, and curators of color—especially for those who had international adventures to enrich their experience. When Shabazz's first book *Back in the Days* was published in 2001, Brooklyn was experiencing a black renaissance, and because he was born and raised in Brooklyn, Shabazz's photographs had a particular appeal. *Back in the Days* also came out at a moment when hip-hop was suffering from an exaggerated commercialism that had exhausted its core values. Whereas hip-hop had originally been described as love, unity, and having fun, by the millennium, materialism, misogyny, and corporate interests characterized hip-hop. Music videos and magazines were focused on hyper commercialism in an attempt to cash in on hip-hop's infectious grove, but much of the spirit of the pioneers and originators of the culture had fallen by the wayside.

Jamel Shabazz's work appealed to a deep-seated nostalgia for early hip-hop values, and a revisionist desire to reclaim its legacy as part of black cultural history. At the same time, Shabazz's work also appealed to the diaspora aesthetics that became prevalent at the millennium, because his representation of hip-hop included Latinos and West Indians as vital contributors to what was formerly understood as a black American culture. When seen in an international trajectory, Jamel Shabazz's images were a powerful record of one

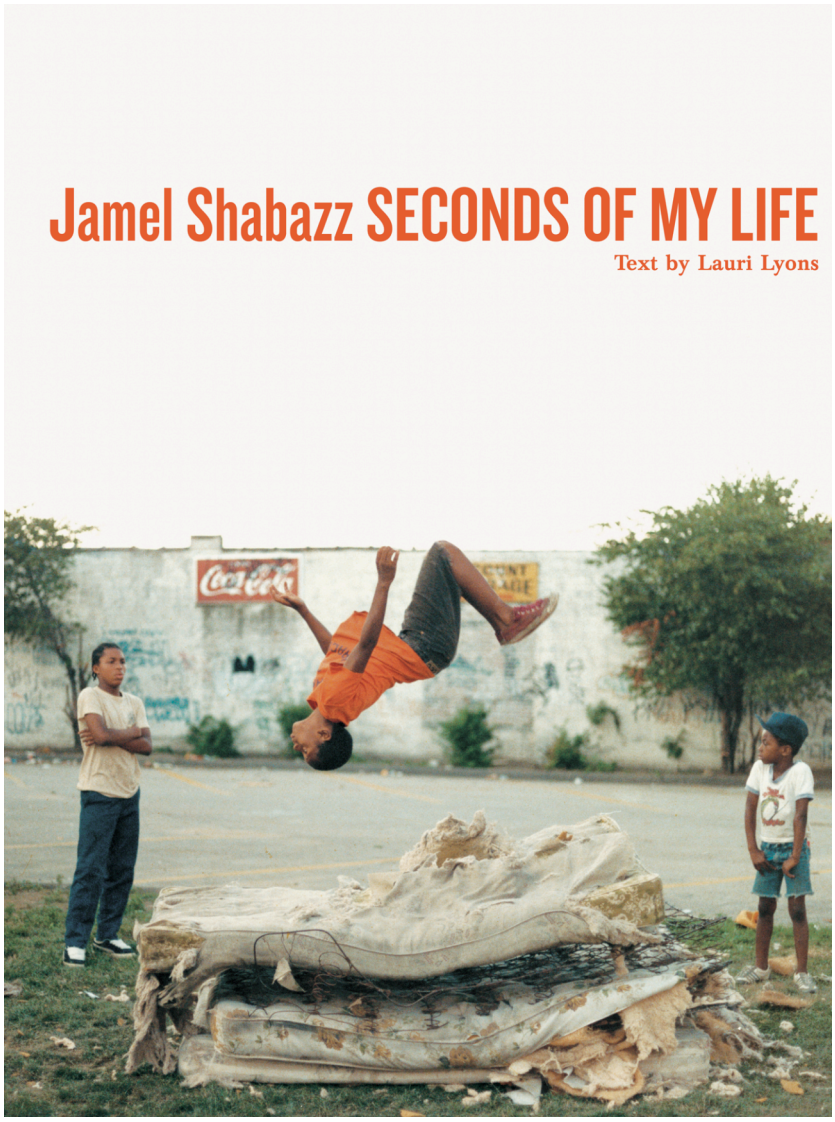
of the most productive moments in global popular culture, and they symbolized the "real" or the root of this culture that was being exported all over the world. His work has fed the mainstream imagination about the roots of hip-hop culture, and the fashion industry has profited immensely from his documentation of trends from the 1980s, since his blockbuster book, *Back in the Days* was sold nationally at clothing stores like Urban Outfitters – where 'throwback' fashions and retro styles became big business. Aware of their appropriation, Shabazz is careful to provide context for his pictures in his published books—his statements, the essays by scholars and photographers, and oftentimes the song lyrics from conscious 1970s and 1980s soul groups that inspired his work are printed next to the photographs to remind the viewer that the images are much more than trendy representations of a stylistic high-point in popular culture. They are images of a community struggling through one of the most difficult economic eras in contemporary U.S. history. They represent a generation born in the 1960s whose boundless creativity managed to create something from nothing, with style and grace.

Jamel Shabazz describes himself as a documentary, fashion, and fine art photographer who was able to connect with his subjects so intimately because his subjects identified with him, trusted him, and understood that he was not photographing to exploit them. By adopting a sincere and transparent practice, imbued with confidence and love, he was able to elicit an essence from his black, Latino, and Caribbean subjects whom other photographers so often misrepresented. The end result was much more than a collection of individual pictures, but rather it has become a portrait of a generation that has been identified by those who lived through the era as insightful, loving, and honest. Shabazz's work has been likened to a community photo album, where the memories of an entire generation are kept. As interdisciplinary artist Coco Fusco explains, "though the fashioning of one's self-image may be most frequently associated with family snapshots or

portraits, the endeavor to see, and thus to know oneself is also a public, communal activity." (Fusco 2003: 13)

Shabazz's subjects are also his collaborators. They offer themselves to the camera and participate in the making of their own representation. This collaborative process is what seems to be missing from many representations of minority communities by photojournalists, whose photos were taken at an emotional and psychological distance. Photographers framed black and brown youth as a problem—and in that way reinforced the societal prejudice that ended up leading to heavy-handed policing, and wholesale incarceration of so many young men of color. Shabazz, being well aware of these negative representations, worked consciously to engage his subjects with respect, and went beyond the photograph to connect with them through conversation.

Historically, negative and pathological representations of black subjects by unscrupulous photographers have worked to reaffirm stereotypes and justify less-than-human treatment. From postcards of lynchings to images of black people as objects of scorn or amusement, the black subject in history has been more often than not, cast in a negative light. Shabazz's photography empowers not only his individual subjects, but also the collective representation of the black subject on a much larger scale. As bell hooks so poignantly observes, "It is only as we collectively change the way we look at ourselves and the world that we can change how we are seen." (hooks 1992: 6) Jamel Shabazz's portraits contribute to this new way of seeing by opening the possibilities for new understandings of black life and culture. With his retrospective book, *Seconds of My Life* (2007), pictured below, we begin to understand that Jamel Shabazz has been chronicling black life in New York for thirty years. He approaches his craft with a passion for his people and the knowledge that he is documenting history.



Who is Jamel Shabazz?

A dignified man who exudes both confidence and humility, Jamel Shabazz evokes honesty and wisdom. He teaches by example. Born in 1960 in New York City, Jamel Shabazz was a child when black became beautiful and black power became a political and social force. He grew up in Red Hook, South Brooklyn, which was a multicultural neighborhood made up of African Americans, West Indians, and Latinos. He explains, "As children, we were all one in the same." (Grunitzky 2004: 139) He was also inspired by Latino culture and

especially by the Universal Zulu Nation, which united Black and Latino gangs. The Zulu Nation would be a major force in the creation of hip-hop culture.

> Zulu is a term referring to African warriors, and the Nation represented that. I found the Latinos in this organization to be very powerful, beautiful people with a sense of appreciation for both worlds that created them. These Latinos were unafraid to represent their African roots. (Shabazz in Grunitzky 2004: 140)

He was an avid reader and loved history, and at age 15, inspired by Malcolm X, he adopted the name Shabazz, which means "noble" or "king" in Arabic. His worldview was shaped by the images of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement at a time when its leaders were being assassinated. Photographer Gordon Parks' was a tremendous inspiration, and *Black and White America* (1968) by photographer Leonard Freed made tremendous impacts on the development of his vision. The turning point came in junior high school, when he saw the stylish posed portraits of the Jolly Stompers gang, which was one of many in Brooklyn. Wanting to document his friends in a similar fashion, Shabazz picked up his mother's instamatic camera and his lifelong relationship with photography had begun.

The year 1977 was important in Shabazz's life because it was when he joined the military and began a three-year tour of duty in Germany. It was also the year that the television series "Roots" was aired on public television, which Shabazz attributes as the source of a change of consciousness among his peers. More menacing was the New York City blackout of 1977, which set off a wave of social and economic destruction and made parts of New York City, like the South Bronx, look like a war zone. Black and Latino youth in poor neighborhoods across the city looted local businesses, and helped themselves to commodities that were formerly unavailable to them for lack of money. The 1977 blackout has been credited for kick-starting hip-hop culture by providing impoverished youth with

the resources they needed to create, especially electronics to make the music, but also the clothing, sneakers, and jewelry for which the era has become so famous.

> More than 2000 stores were pillaged, and estimates of property damage ran as high as one billion—enough to qualify the stricken areas for federal disaster aid. A mile and a half of Brooklyn's Broadway was put to the torch. Protective metal grills were torn off storefronts with crobars, battered down with cars, and dragged down by brute force. Teenagers first, then grade-schoolers and grown ups rifled shops and markets for clothes, appliances, furniture, television sets, groceries—even 50 Pontiacs from a Bronx dealership. (Newsweek, July 25, 1977)

Shabazz was in New York at the time, with his upcoming military inscription keeping him home and off the streets. Soon after the blackout, Shabazz shipped out to Germany. He was grateful that his military experience gave him discipline and appreciation for life. He lost many friends and colleagues to the perils of the streets: drugs and violence. Upon his return from abroad, Jamel Shabazz photographed New York City with unflinching commitment to photograph his people, who included mostly African American, Caribbean, and Latino youth. His images are full of pride and dignity, and individuals pose and present themselves to his camera, looking the viewer straight in the eyes. Shabazz connected with his subjects in meaningful ways, imbuing his practice with an honesty that can only be described as love. Shabazz explained that often before photographing people, he told them that he loved them, that he saw something beautiful in them, and their reaction was reflected in their eyes. Shabazz was conscientious in his practice: he gave photographs to his subjects, he always carried books of his work, and he stimulated conversations that went beyond photography. He felt a sense of responsibility to the youth, to help raise their awareness and self-respect. He became a corrections officer in 1983 and spent many years working in the prison system, which undoubtedly affirmed his commitment to expand black and Latino youth's consciousness to keep them out trouble.

Now a successful artist, Jamel Shabazz has published four books and has exhibited his work internationally in over 20 solo exhibitions and 30 group exhibitions. He has maintained his commitment to mentorship, and continues to make himself accessible to what he calls the generation of young visionaries that regularly comes to him for guidance and support. Shabazz has organized a number of exhibitions for emerging photographers, taught through philanthropic organizations, and maintains an approachable air despite his success. He attributes this sense of artist responsibility to the black arts movement, which had considerable impact in forming his worldview early on. That movement insisted that black artists give back to their communities, inspire them, and become leaders in the revolutionary struggle to reclaim the black image. He also engages his subjects beyond just photography, and understands his creative process as profoundly collaborative.

Masculinity is central to Jamel Shabazz's work, and his photographs have been appreciated for their honest representations of black and brown men with a sense of dignity, rather than as objects for public scorn or consumption. Clearly, his subjective position as a black male influenced how many of his subjects reacted to him, but beyond that, Shabazz managed to tap into an unexplored aura of black masculinity that was based—unlike what the stereotype tells us—on love. His mentorship and his practice of imparting knowledge and making meaningful connections with his subjects made of him a role model, particularly for young men who he did not want to see in prison.

This is not to suggest that there is a gender-bias in his work, as it is surprisingly balanced in its representations of men and women. Not only are there just about as many women as there are men in Shabazz's books, but also viewing his photographs does not bring about the feeling of a sexual or exploitative gaze that one often has when reading a magazine or watching television advertisements. His respectful and dignified portraits of women give us a sense of the trust and rapport he had with his photographic subjects. In interviews, Shabazz openly displays his disgust with contemporary representations of Black

and Latina women who are very often put on display for sexual consumption. Seeing this as a vicious cycle, with young women taking their cues from popular culture, Shabazz is very conscious about challenging these damaging representations of women in his own work, as well as in the workshops he organizes for the youth.

> I've learned from so many people that were considered outcasts in society. I found them most compelling. I started talking to prostitutes in the very beginning, and that really moved me, because oftentimes people see prostitutes in one light, I started to hang out with them and I saw their innocence, I saw their beauty, I saw their pain, and it really opened me up to just listen and learn from them and not judge them. And even with the gang-bangers today, often times we see them and we judge them not realizing what they've gone through in life that's caused them to be on that particular path. So I learn from them, they learn from me, and then we walk on the path together. (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

CHAPTER III

THE BLACK AESTHETIC AND THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

Examining historical representations of African Americans is critical to understanding the work of black conscious photographers like Jamel Shabazz. With such a long history of misrepresentation, many photographers became politicized and sought to counter many of these stereotypes and psychologically debilitating images through their work. More than just simply making positive images, they worked to show the multifaceted aspects of black life, and rejected narrow and pathological representations.

> Photography gave to black folks, irrespective of our class, a means by which we could participate fully in the production of images. Hence it is essential that any theoretical discussion of the relationship of black life to the visual, to art making, make photography central. Access and mass appeal have historically made photography a powerful location for the construction of an oppositional black aesthetic. (Willis 1994: 45)

Early on, W.E.B. DuBois understood the power of images, and his "Exhibit of the American Negro" at the 1900 World Fair in Paris was based almost entirely on photography. (Shaw 1898: 575) DuBois' goal was to acknowledge the critical contributions of African Americans to the sciences, economics, and overall culture of the United States. This exhibition was notable not only because it was about African Americans, but also because African Americans organized it. Being that racism in the United States was so pronounced at the time, activists like DuBois took to the world stage to make their case to prove African American humanity at a time when non-white peoples were ascribed a less-than human status. In the hands of imperialist domination, photography objectified the "other" for white public consumption. "One of the exclusive

entitlements of the propertied class was the gaze. The disenfranchised were fixed at the receiving end of the right to scrutinize." (Taylor 2001: 15)

Back in the United States, DuBois and his contemporaries edited literary journals, wrote profusely, and engaged in vigilant criticism of the dominant racist ideologies of the day. Beyond being an advocate for African Americans, DuBois was an internationalist who believed in Pan-Africanism, and worked for the cause of the Diaspora globally, not just in the U.S. context.[2] Another internationalist, Marcus Garvey, would galvanize millions in his United Negro Improvement Association and publish *Negro World*, one of the few truly transnational journals of the epoch. The publication sought to draw connections between the multiple human rights struggles in which African diaspora communities were engaged. Pan-Africanism was the historical foundation upon which later diasporic frameworks would build upon.

In Paris, a similar movement of Caribbean and African intellectuals and artists was also producing literature, fine art, and criticism that was both inspired by what was happening in the United States. "Many of the black literati invested in one way or another in the notion of Harlem as a worldwide black culture capital, and yet many of them came to view Paris as a special space for black transnational interaction, exchange, and dialogue." (Edwards 2003: 5)

Moreover, there were the struggles for independence in the colonized world in the interwar period, but especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Paris figured prominently as a meeting point for decolonization struggles, providing a space where activists and intellectuals from various nations built a movement. Journals and ideas spread internationally, and the intellectual and artistic climate was developing into what would

[2] DuBois would play a critical role in the Pan-African Congress, first held in 1919 and then five more times, most notably in 1945 when international Diaspora figures including Padmore, Appiah, Nkrumah, and Kenyatta were also in attendance. He also wrote extensively, including a book called The World and Africa in 1946 and a follow-up to that book in 1965.

culminate in the Negritude movement, with heightened artistic and literary production that placed "African-ness" at its core.[3] African independence movements in the 1950s and 1960s radically increased the importance of the arts, which were so central to defining and engaging new postcolonial realities. Leopold Senghor, then President of Senegal, held the first Festival of Black Arts in Dakar in 1966, with the mission of bringing together Africans from the continent and in Diaspora to engage the power of the arts in identity and nation building. The festival title was "The Function and Importance of Black and African Art, for Peoples and in Peoples," and its mission according to Senghor was to "to contribute to an understanding between peoples, to assert the contribution by black artists and writers to universal thought, and to enable black artists to compare the results of their explorations."[4] This is but one example of the heightened consciousness that Pan-Africanism aroused. These ideas would be reignited at the millennium decades later in the contemporary Diaspora aesthetic movement that celebrates internationalism and cultural exchange.

Toward a Black Aesthetic

In the United States, the black aesthetic debates of the 1920s peaked during the Harlem Renaissance. With the abundant publication of literature characteristic of the time, black critics strove to define what constituted good art, on terms independent from the mainstream, which had a tendency to praise the kind of black art that reified existing stereotypes like the highly popular book *Nigger Heaven* (Van Vechten 1926) and the film "The Birth of a Nation." (Griffith 1915) Scholars and literary critics like Alain Locke and Harold Cruse, in journals like *Crisis* and *Opportunity* provided a platform for the

[3] Leopold Senghor was a Senegalese poet, cultural theorist and later a politician who championed Negritude as an artistic rebuttal of colonialism. Aimé Cesaire of Martinique was also a founder of the movement, as was Léon Damas.

[4] United Nations Secretariat: http://www.mediaglobal.org/article/2009-01-23/world-festival-of-the-black-arts-launches-at-the-united-nations

expression of black literary arts and acted as hosts for black aesthetic debates. Class played a large roll in this era, with many African American critics and intellectuals insisting that artists portray black middle class values rather than deal with the underbelly of black life. W.E.B. Dubois famously proclaimed that "all art is propaganda" and artists therefore were obligated to uplift the race and make positive representations of African Americans in their work so as to gain mainstream acceptance for, and understanding of, black people. (DuBois in Napier ed. 2000: 22) Clearly, not all artists headed the call, and many refused to limit their creativity to black bourgeois standards. Famed poet Langston Hughes was one of the younger artists who, with his much-quoted essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," proclaimed artistic freedom for his generation:

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter either. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too...If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (Hughes cited in Gayle 1972: 172)

Photography and the Civil Rights Movement

Since the dawn of photography's invention, African American photographers, like Prentice Polk, James Latimer Allen, Addison Surlock, and Cornelius Marion Battey have been working to represent their communities with pride, dignity, and self-respect (Willis 2000). Photography played a critical role in the civil rights movement, bearing witness to the horrors of Jim Crow segregation, police brutality, and white resistance to integration. Images of black people being lynched, attacked by dogs, and brutalized were too powerful to ignore. Photographs of Emmit Till's mutilated body after he was beaten to death for

whistling at a white woman in Mississippi galvanized civil rights leaders and artists in particular, who made songs, paintings, and poems about the incident. Creating positive representations of black subjects not just in literature but also through photography was especially important in this hostile climate. "Photography was instrumental in… motivating cultural change and defining the significance of the struggle for human and civil rights that eventually forced the Federal government into creating laws against racial domination and discrimination." (Willis in Fusco 2003: 280)

Acclaimed photographer Dawoud Bey explains the feeling that many black photographers had during the civil rights era:

> From early on I have been aware of how the black subject has been represented, misrepresented, used, misused, abused, and deformed and degraded throughout the history of social and visual culture. That called for a response. (Bey 2007: 146)

The Black Aesthetic and Photography

It was in describing the work of Roy DeCarava that the term "black aesthetic" was first applied to photography. (Duganne in Collins ed. 2006: 187) DeCarava's seminal book, *The Sweetflypaper of Life* originally published in 1955, was the product of a collaboration with Langston Hughes and beautifully described life in postwar Harlem. Desegregation had just been federally mandated, and integration became a rallying call for many early civil rights leaders. DeCarava's beautiful black and white photographs, with rich shadows and exquisite composition, were critically and publicly well received. While not explicitly written for children, its images and text made it highly accessible, and many contemporary black photographers cite the book's influence on their early development. *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* was powerful in that it was considered a positive representation of black life without being overly propagandistic. Besides his work on the historic collaboration with Langston Hughes, Roy DeCarava studied photography at the prestigious Cooper

Union art school in New York. He was the proprietor in 1954 of one of the first American art galleries devoted to the exhibition of photography as fine art. Additionally, DeCarava is an important figure in the history of African American photography because he was one of the founders of the Kamoinge black photographers' collective.

Harlem on my Mind: Photography and the Public Imagination

Harlem both as a physical space as well as a mythical one has had particular importance in black cultural history. Conceived as an exhibition about the cultural capital of black America, "Harlem on My Mind" opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969. A multimedia exhibition that included sound, newspaper articles and photography, Harlem on My Mind strove to give the audience a sense of daily life and of the cultural history of Harlem. Seventy-five thousand people saw the show in its first nine days and hundreds of thousands more during its three months run. The viewing audience included many contemporary black photographers who were moved and inspired by its content. The exhibition also marked an important turn in art history toward more sensory and multimedia formats, which encouraged public participation beyond the classical tradition of art, hung on white walls. With this show, "the era of museums as places of silent contemplation had ended." The Harlem on My Mind catalog was republished in 1995 with an introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who called it "one of the richest and most comprehensive records of the history of the African American in the twentieth century. (Schoener 1995: 8)

Even so, Harlem on My Mind is most remembered for the many layers of controversy it ignited. For example, despite hiring several black assistants, the curator Allon Schoener was unable to forge strong relationships with the Harlem community, which led to a multiplicity of problems. First and foremost, black visual artists were outraged that none among them were invited to contribute work to the first-ever exhibition

dealing with a black subject at a major American museum. Instead the entire exhibition was based on socio-documentary and editorial artifacts, which demeaned black artists and the black community who were put on display for mainstream consumption with very little say on how they were represented. There was an anthropological bent to the exhibit that gave the impression that black lives were curiosities to be studied rather than engaged as equal creative contributors to American art history. To add to the insult, the show's title came from a song about "slumming" in Harlem's sultry nightlife by white cabaret singer Irving Berlin, which added to the indignation about Harlem being a place for white exploitation, pleasure, and consumption of black art and black bodies.

The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition was formed in response to these issues, and led by prominent black artists, including Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis; they picketed the show's opening and maintained a presence throughout the show's three-month run at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Braithwaite 1993: 59) Photographer and scholar Dr. Deborah Willis' recollection of the exhibit describes the tension surrounding the exhibit:

> I vividly recall walking through the exhibition wondering why protestors on the front steps were carrying placards saying "Whitey Has Harlem on His Mind-We Have Africa on our Mind." At twenty-one, never having seen images of black people exhibited in a major museum, outside of a natural history museum, I felt great pride in that presentation. But I also felt conflicted… I later heard the issues voiced this way: Why were photography and social issues being examined in an art museum? Why were there no black artists on the curatorial advisory committee? (Willis 2005: 166)

The issue was what Gates has problematized as "the social and documentary status of black art" that constantly ties black artists to sociological realities over esoteric or formalistic notions of fine art. (Gates in Napier ed. 2000: 147) Many black intellectuals and

artists understood Harlem on My Mind as a pseudo-ethnographic study of black American life not as a serious inquiry into the state of black arts. Nonetheless, it was historically important, because it presented Harlem history and affected both mainstream white audiences that came to see the exhibit, but also black Americans that were finally able to see themselves represented in a major cultural institution. The catalogue itself was so valuable that it was republished nearly thirty years later, prefaced by politicians Charles Rangel and Bill Clinton. When it was published, however, the catalogue was met with widespread protest, not only from the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, but also from the Jewish Defense League. A young, black high school student had been asked to write an essay for the exhibition, and she quoted the infamous Moynihan Report, saying that blacks shared in the national prejudice against Jews. As a result, thousands of exhibition catalogues were stored away from the public, and later distributed to black cultural organizations. Sadly, the controversy surrounding the exhibit resulted in the historical erasure of the show. Black cultural critic Michele Wallace laments, "It still makes me weep when I search the Metropolitan Museum's art history timeline on the web for VanDerZee, to find no trace of him or of Harlem on My Mind." (Wallace 2009: 26)

James VanDerZee Revisited

One of the most valuable results of Harlem on My Mind was the rediscovery of photographer James VanDerZee, whose work was central to the exhibition. His work is a standout example of this positive representation of black life in the 1920s and 1930s. In his Harlem studio, VanDerZee photographed his subjects for their personal use: marriage and family portraits, portraits of the who-is-who of Harlem's social and political life. No matter who was in front of his lens, VanDerZee took great care to ensure that they were properly represented and looking their best. A curatorial assistant for the Harlem On My Mind exhibition, the black photojournalist Reggie McGhee, came across the VanDerZee's

treasure trove of images from the 1920s and 1930s. Being that he was a commercial photographer who idealized his clients and represented them with pride, beauty, and dignity, VanDerZee was able to offer a positive depiction of black life in Harlem, which was just what the Harlem on My Mind exhibition needed. Thousands of photographs of individuals, community groups, entrepreneurs, artists, politicians and community activists were part of the VanDerZee archive, and each of these portraits took into account how the subject wanted to be represented, allowing each to dress, pose, and compose themselves for their photographs. With the exception of his year-long employ as photographer for Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), VanDerZee's photos were originally intended as commercial products, and not necessarily journalistic or documentary photos. People came to his studio for portraits for family and loved ones, for funeral portraits, and for mementos and keepsakes. VanDerZee's record of black life is a testament to such a rich cultural history that without his archive historians would be left to 'outsider' representations of Harlem in its heyday, which was fixated by scantily clad women and speakeasies. With VanDerZee's archive, Harlem's middle class, as well as daily life, was represented in a humanistic and non-voyeuristic way, making them seem more authentic. By being one among his subjects, VanDerZee was able to show us the individuals of the era along with their values and tastes. It must be remembered that between the 1920s and the 1950s representations of black Americans were very often negative, stereotypical, and made from a distance, largely because of the systemic racism that prevailed in American social relations. The Harlem that captured the mainstream imagination was one of speakeasies, objectified black beauties, vice, crime, and exploitation. VanDerZee was able to offer history a completely different perspective that emphasized community, culture, and a strong social fabric that was able to thrive despite the odds. His images are of black pride and pleasure, and not originally intended for white mainstream consumption. With the Harlem on My Mind exhibition, VanDerZee's images were made public and became part

of the national recollection of the era—an amazing contribution to both American history and black cultural history.

> Whereas the vast majority of VanDerZee's portraits were intended for the private use of the individual customers who purchased them for relatives and friends, when they were exhibited in public museums and galleries for the first time, the photographs were reinterpreted as expressive documents in their own right. (Mercer 2003: 4)

When asked about it, Jamel Shabazz sees himself as working in James VanDerZee's legacy. There are many notable similarities between them. Both were masters of portraiture, and both were discovered by the mainstream several decades after they had produced their signature work. Also, while their photographs were originally intended for personal use, both James VanDerZee and Jamel Shabazz saw their work exhibited widely in the public sphere. Most importantly, each contributed to the making of a "collective counter-memory" of the black experience—one that does not take its cues from mainstream representations, but that was created from the inside. George Lipsitz defines counter-memory as:

> (…) A way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal…Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives. But unlike myths that seek to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past. (Lipsitz 1990: 213)

Like VanDerZee, Jamel Shabazz has made a similar kind of contribution to history—one that has helped revise popular conceptions of 1980s New York City, hip-hop culture, black diasporic sensibilities, contemporary art, and global popular culture. However, whereas VanDerZee photographed in a studio, Shabazz worked in the streets. While there is no lack

of images from the 1980s of burned out tenements or subway cars bombed with graffiti—there are very few public images that give a sense of what life was like for the people who lived in these communities. Looking at Shabazz's pictures is like looking through a personal photo album, and those who view it feel privileged to be offered such an intimate experience. Shabazz can tell a story about each one of his photos: who is in the photo, what happened to them, when he saw them last, and what lessons they had to teach him. Another important aspect about Shabazz's living legacy is that he has been able to bridge the civil rights and hip-hop generations in a way that few academics and artists have been able to do. Public intellectual Mark Anthony Neal, who, like Shabazz, was born in the 1960s puts it this way: "We are, perhaps, the black community's best intellectual hope to bridge the widening gap between yesterday's civil rights marcher and today's hip-hop thug." (Neal 2002: 104) Jamel Shabazz's commitment to mentorship is just as much a part of his practice as his photography.

> As an older person, I'm trying to give back to the community. When I was falling through the cracks, older people approached me, and we had this philosophy, each one must teach one, so when I was given the knowledge by some of the elders, they always said go back to your community and give back. Doing it verbally was one thing, but as a photographer you just take it to a whole new level. (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

Kamoinge: Working Together

To theorize the idea of a black aesthetic in photography, it helps to examine the work of the Kamoinge photographers collective of which Jamel Shabazz is a member. Founded in New York in 1963 at the height of the civil rights era and at the dawn of black power movements, the Kamoinge photographers collective sought to redress the lack of representation of black photographers in the fine and commercial art worlds. Early on, the

group was an important bastion from the systemic racism that many black photographers faced in promoting and distributing their work. Despite its strong collective spirit, Kamoinge also encouraged a breadth of different photographer subjectivities and embraced the many individual photographers' perspectives on the black experience. Rather than being heavily proscriptive and encouraging black photographers to deal solely with so-called black themes, Kamoinge has and continues to encourage its members to follow their voices and visions regardless of any obligation to deal with blackness as an explicit concept. While it is often assumed that this group was aligned with the black arts movement because it was founded in the 1960s, scholar Erina Duganne's research has shown that the Kamoinge collective refused to be limited by the proscriptive tendencies of black power/black arts, and encouraged its members to explore the world according to their distinct and multiple vantage points, encouraging subtlety and specificity over dogma.

> Rather than speak for African Americans as a group or act as a corrective lens, the Kamoinge members used their photographs to explore how the particularities of their individual circumstances—including their collective experience of racial difference—informed and complicated their art. (Duganne 2006: 189)

Duganne's intervention is notable because it displaces the simplistic, essentialist notions of a black aesthetic as it relates to photography, and emphasizes the agency and individuality of each of the Kamoinge photographers, including Jamel Shabazz, who while proud to be black, refuse to be limited in his work and placed in a box. Like many photographers in his cohort, Shabazz asserts that he should be free to explore whatever theme or topic interests him, refusing to be restricted to so-called black subject matter. In his words: "I don't want to be called a "black" photographer just like you wouldn't describe someone as a "white" photographer. I can show you pictures where you wouldn't even know I'm black." (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

Still, Kamoinge's mission remains intact, and its members, including Shabazz, work steadily to challenge systemic racism and narrow representations of the black experience by producing a range of photographic work that often deals with black themes. Other black arts influences can be found in Kamoinge's sense of community, artist responsibility, and the notion that black photographers need a peer group outside of mainstream constructs in which to critique and engage each other's work.

Black Artists and the Burden of Representation

Acclaim and public recognition for black photographers often carries what Kobena Mercer has called the "burden of representation" or a sense of responsibility to create positive images in order to counter centuries of negative stereotypes and mischaracterizations, and a sense that the artist becomes representative of his or her entire race or ethnicity. (Mercer 1994: 91) Since photographers of color, not just blacks but also others of so-called minority ethnic groups, often rise to mainstream prominence one at a time, they are often expected to speak for their entire communities. Thus black photographers have traditionally been expected to deal with "black themes," which are often defined by mainstream white society. This is an impossible task considering the multiplicity of subject positions in any one specific "racial" group. Differences across class, gender, and sexual orientation cannot be reduced or simplified, and there is no one monolithic black community. Mercer explains the burden of representation

> …Whereby the artistic discourse of hitherto marginalized subjects is circumscribed by the assumption that such artists speak as 'representatives' of the communities from which they come—a role which not only creates a burden that is logically impossible for any one individual to bear, but which is also integral to the iron law of the stereotype that reinforces the view from the majority culture that every minority subject is, essentially, the same. (Mercer 1994: 214)

When I interviewed him, I asked Jamel Shabazz specifically about this idea of the burden of representation. He responded by stressing that he wanted to be free of any pigeonholes that would limit him; however, his actions would attest that he has embraced some fundamental aspects of artistic responsibility that came bundled with his success. Legendary photographer Gordon Parks, who was one of Shabazz's roll models and mentors, also rejected the idea of carrying a burden of representation, despite being the first African American photographer to work for the Works Progress Administration, the first to build up a commercial fashion photography career, and the first to work for the most prestigious news magazines of the 1950s and 1960s. In his autobiography, Gordon Parks wrote: "I have never gloried at being the first black photographer to enter those closed doors at *Life* magazine, *Vogue* or any of the other places. I like to feel they were opened for my race as well as me. I did realize that I was making fresh tracks, but I never carried the responsibility around on my back like a sack of stones." (Parks 1990: 327)

Other black photographers, like the highly acclaimed photojournalist Eli Reed, took on a special responsibility to use the camera to investigate racial inequality. In his book, *Black in America* (1997), Reed explains that while he photographed in the deadly war zones of Beirut, El Salvador, Haiti, and Zaire, the situation of black people in his own country weighed heavily on his mind. He began documenting life in black America as a personal project when publications had little interest in the subject. He focused on the black middle class, which he saw neglected in popular representations. "The most common response I received was, 'You are too close to the subject.'" (Reed 1997) It is difficult to imagine a white photographer being told anything similar.

The Black Arts Movement

Originally conceived as the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept," the black arts movement of the 1960s was a powerful force in the development of black

cultural theory. (Neal 1972: 257) Art became "functional in the sense that art becomes a true reflection of the community, like a camera which photographs the empirical fabric of life instead of merely dramatizing its abstractions." (Barbour 1970: 86) Photography with its documentary capabilities was seen as a powerful tool for providing the images that would serve this ideological revolution for black self-determination. Black artists had a responsibility to engage and present their work to their communities, and a love ethic was at the center of the movement, one that encouraged black people to love themselves and their culture. There was a sense of collective purpose that was reminiscent of the Harlem renaissance from 30 years before. Larry Neil, one of the movement's principal contributors, described the era in this way: "Never before had black artists entered into such a conscious spiritual union of goal and purpose. For the first time in history there existed a 'new' constellation of symbols and images around which to develop a group ethos." (Barbour 1970: 28) Jamel Shabazz was deeply impacted by this movement, which he defines as follows:

> The black arts movement was about creating artwork that was in a sense revolutionary; it was inspired and dealt with the times: Civil Rights, racism, the Vietnam War. It was about trying to gather creative minds, and not only black minds, but conscious minds, and deal with the social issues that were going on. Not only photographers, but also painters, poets, and musicians were producing art that spoke to the spirituality that spoke to the human condition. That's what I was raised on, so I was striving to do that at the same time – to revive a movement of artists who are using their skills for upliftment and empowerment. (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

Poet and public intellectual Amiri Baraka is credited with founding the movement in 1964 when he started the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School otherwise known as BARTS in Harlem. Its major tenets included artist responsibility to community, positive

empowerment through art, and the development of a critical practice that did not depend on Western, mainstream, or white sensibilities. The black arts movement rejected the notion of art for art's sake, and framed art making as a highly political project. Black artists were to be tasked to create art for black people. Black arts critics were to judge "not how beautiful is a melody, a play, a poem, or a novel, but how much more beautiful has the poem, melody, play or novel made the life of a singe black man." (Gayle 1972: xxii) Houston Baker explains the black aesthetic in the following way:

> More than a simple, theoretical strategy motivated by idealism, the phrase has served as a poetic construct, and as an artistic slogan raising substantive issues in aesthetics… The Black Aesthetic, in its various usages and effects, has given to a newly realized black collectivity and its artists a sense of holism, a sense of an essential reciprocity between black art and black culture. (Baker 1980: 142)

Distinctly nationalistic, the black arts movement represented a generational break with the integrationist civil rights movement that came before it. Rather than begging the question of black humanity, the black arts movement sought to define an artistic and critical practice that was not based on white acceptance. Since it was ideologically linked with the black power concept, the black arts movement was openly radical in demanding "poems that kill" like Amiri Baraka in the same way that black power committed to freedom "by any means necessary" like Malcolm X. Art was not to be considered as an abstract life embellishment, but rather a critical aspect of the black revolution that would inspire people to keep fighting and also help to create the new world that revolutionaries were fighting for.

Ironically, despite its separatist origins, the movement's legacy includes the integration of black studies into the academy, as well as the development an African American literary cannon, and support for black artists in national public arts platforms. Institutions like the Studio Museum in Harlem are but one example of the real-world manifestations of the black arts movement. Still, the tendency was to prioritize literature

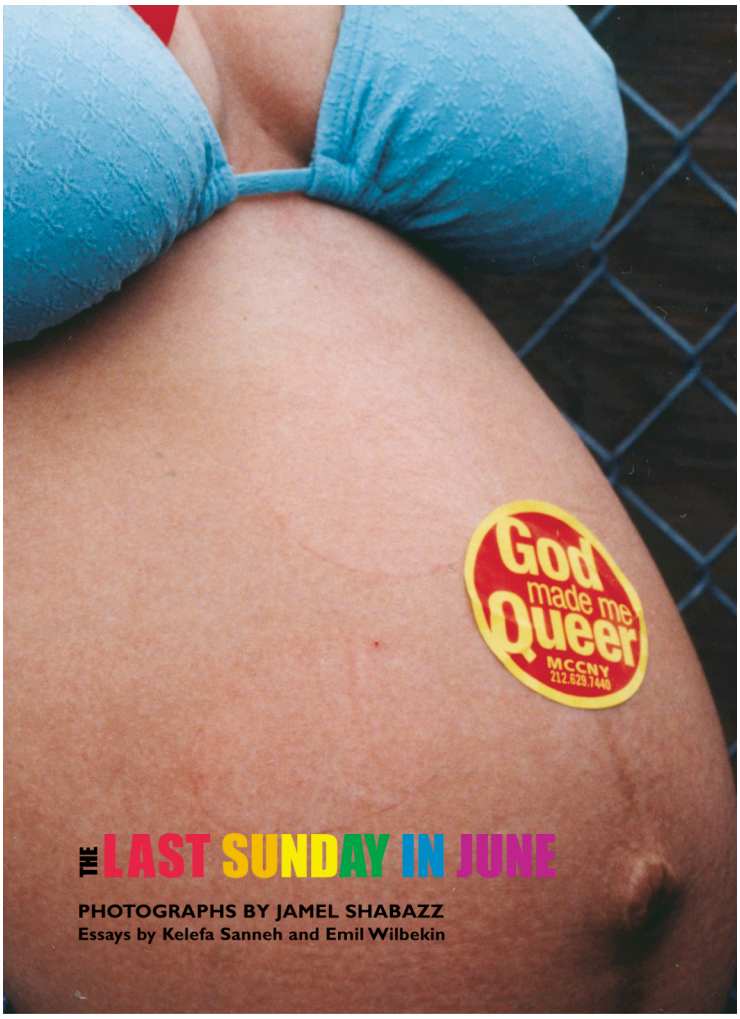
over fine arts, which is why there is an abundance of literary criticism that contrasts with what happened with photography, for example.

> When Black Arts Movement (BAM) advocates such as Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka sought to fuse aesthetics and politics into the all-encompassing demand that black art be made "by, for, and about" black people, the result was a hierarchy in which music, theater, and performance poetry, being closer to the vernacular rhythms of the streets and the long-standing wisdom of folk belief, would be championed as more "authentically black" than potentially elitist and more esoteric fine arts like painting or sculpture. (Mercer 2005: 152)

Still, the movement was also foundational in the development of a generation of black visual artists like Jamel Shabazz who has integrated many of its core values into his life and practice. Artist responsibility, collective empowerment, and black consciousness are foundational in Shabazz's work, and he cites the black arts movement as a major influence on his artistic and personal development. By internalizing these core values of the black arts movement, Jamel Shabazz has been able to bring its legacy into the present by engaging his subjects, students, and the public with a fundamental commitment to make positive impact on his community. In many ways, Shabazz was able to glean the positive aspects of the era, and leave behind many of its essentialist tendencies, always acknowledging the importance of multiple cultural, political, and social influences in his life and philosophy.

Shabazz was the target of criticism for taking on the taboo subject of homosexuality in his second book, *The Last Sunday in June* (2003), which contains a series of photographs from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parade held in New York City every year, on the last Sunday in June. Over the course of several years, Shabazz photographed the parade, documenting the flamboyance, joy, love, and politics of this often misrepresented community. Shabazz admitted that he was apprehensive about doing the

project and as a heterosexual black male, his "biggest concern was being viewed as a participant in the Life." (Shabazz interview with author 2008) Many of the sexually explicit and so-called "freakish" individuals who Shabazz photographed offended his core constituency and revealed some of the limits of black cultural values. While the book received remarkable praise from *The New York Times*, *The Last Sunday in June* was a bane on his career, and Shabazz's colleagues rebuked him for taking on such a controversial subject. Since his work was so closely identified with hip-hop and the black arts movement, which both suffered from rampant homophobia, *The Last Sunday in June* was seen as a major transgression, to the point that Shabazz does not list the book on his website along with his three other monographs.



This is just one example of how while the black arts and black power movements were extremely productive in envisioning the revolutionary possibilities of art in black communities, it nevertheless privileged the male, heteronormative point of view to the point that it greatly limited the potential contributions and participation of a variety of potential allies.

Black women who contributed to the black arts movement were generally expected to buy into patriarchal norms in order to advance the cause of black liberation, without challenging the multiple layers of oppression that they faced. Nor did the parallel feminist movement of the 1960s offer any more support, because its white leadership largely refused to acknowledge the exponential oppression borne by black women because of their compounded race and gender. (Davis 1994: 52) Also, by insisting that art be propagandistic and politically in line with the nationalist project of black power, artists were denied the opportunity to express difference or dissent. The justification for censorship was based on an "us-versus-them" mentality that saw the world in black and white terms, when in actuality the reality was of course much more nuanced. Had artists been freer to explore these grey areas without ostracism, it might have been more resilient and better positioned to respond to the massive appropriation of some of the black arts movement's most potent symbols, slogans, and iconography.

While counter intelligence programs directed by the CIA were working to assassinate black power's leadership, the mainstream media began an insidious campaign to trivialize the movement's ideological successes. Bell hooks explains the conundrum best: "Institutionalizing a politics of representation which included black images, thus ending years of racial segregation, while reproducing the status quo, undermined black self-determination." (hooks 1994: 208) Thus, while black images became part of popular culture and the American historical imagination, the underlying structures of racism were still very much in place. Angela Davis, for example, laments that after all of her intellectual

work, she is most often remembered for her Afro. Photography had a large role to play in this decontextualization of black power-era iconography, which still affects how the movement is remembered in the public imagination.

> The unprecedented contemporary circulation of photographic and filmic images of African Americans has multiple and contradictory implications. On the one hand, it holds the promise of visual memory of older and departed generations, of both well-known figures and people who may not have achieved public prominence. However, there is also the danger that this historical memory may become ahistorical and apolitical. (Davis 1994: 24)

What Davis describes also applies to the work of Jamel Shabazz. As his photographs gained commercial prominence, they were often seen merely as fashion statements about hip-hop instead of critical engagements with history. These powerful images have often been misappropriated and Shabazz's work has often been parodied to sell products—everything from Kool-Aid to clothing. Even more, his book, Back in the Days (2001) has been used to 'sell' a nostalgic notion of hip-hop culture that both affirms its more positive representations, but also exemplifies its commodification. Still, its essence has inspired a reconsideration of hip-hop culture.

CHAPTER IV

HIP-HOP CULTURE

> More than just the fashion, I want to see the mind-state of that era come back—the mindset of love and unity. When we said "peace" it meant something; it came from the heart. (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

Back in the Days

Now a ubiquitous mainstay in global popular culture and "as the major cultural movement of our time," hip-hop started underground as an innovative response to massive disenfranchisement of working class youth of color in the 1980s. (Kitwana 2004: 341) Even before "hip-hop" was part of the popular imagination, Jamel Shabazz was photographing its torch-bearers—the young men and women who came of age in post-industrial New York City and who were determined to make their creative mark on society despite their marginalization. Shabazz's subjects posed proudly, showing off their sense of fashion, their joy, and their aspirations. When his first book, *Back in the Days*, was released in 2001, Shabazz was immediately recognized as a visionary whose representation of hip-hop challenged the status quo, especially the hip-hop gangsterism, misogyny, and cult of personality upon which corporate interests had capitalized. Shabazz's exceptional style coupled with the fact that his subjects were anonymous—not famous rappers and artists, but real people living through an exceptional moment in black cultural history.

Over the past 30 years, hip-hop has established itself as a culture, a way of life, and a framework for understanding the world. New York City's economic and social conditions in the 1970s provided a fertile terrain for the birth of hip-hop, which continued to grow exponentially in the 1980s from a marginalized subculture to a highly influential cultural movement. In the 1990s, hip-hop was fully commercialized, and by the year 2000,

it became a billion-dollar global industry. Hip-hop is difficult to define, because it is so multifaceted and because its meaning has changed through time and in each particular social and geographic location where it developed. In New York in the early 1980s, the elements of hip-hop included rapping, deejaying, break dancing, and graffiti. Hip-hop was born in the margins, both spatially and economically, in the outer boroughs of New York City, where black and Latino youth lived and created hip-hop using leftovers such as discarded electronics and fashions, which they refigured to become fresh again. It was not until 1981 that pioneer Africa Bambaataa began to refer to this youth movement as 'hip-hop.' (Chang 2007: 59) Today, hip-hop has seeped into the mainstream, moving from the margin to the center of American popular culture.

Hip-hop has enjoyed a considerable amount of not only public but also academic attention, with a virtual explosion of hip-hop studies courses, books, lectures, and symposia in the nation's most prestigious universities. Hip-hop culture's four archetypes include the deejay, the emcee, the break-dancer, and the graffiti writer, in addition to the aficionados who listen to the music, study its philosophy, and embrace its core values: originality, competition, and knowledge of self. Now understood as part of a continuum of black popular culture, hip-hop is theorized as the next major cultural movement since black power which, like the Harlem renaissance and jazz, has suffered from massive appropriation and depolitisation since its entry into national and global entertainment markets.

Reconsidering hip-hop culture at its inception is critical to understanding its power, which has more recently been overrun by corporate interests, and Jamel Shabazz's work engages the idea of hip-hop at its root and has given energy to revisionist reclamation of hip-hop as a culture based on love, unity, peace, creativity, and struggle. Shabazz's photos offer a different view of the turbulent 1980s, and challenge stereotypical ideas about what hip-hop has become by offering a vision of what it was and how he saw it. It has also

served to mend the generational divide that has sometimes pitted the civil rights generation against the hip-hop generation by showing a visual and historical continuity between these two eras. More than anything, Jamel Shabazz as a public intellectual and artist, has worked to become the bridge that links these movements together, and goes even further to establish links between the black arts movement, hip-hop culture, and where they fit in global diaspora aesthetics.

The Importance of Style and Fashion in Hip-Hop

Style is one of the fundamental aspects of hip-hop culture. It incorporates fashion even as it goes way beyond it. In graffiti, style was the mark of true genius, the most original, complex, metaphorical, or otherwise unique masterpiece. It was the same with break dancing—b-boys and b-girls spent countless hours creating the most original styles of dance that could be so difficult to execute or so outlandish that a dancer would always be remembered for the move that he or she created. In deejaying, style was about keeping the party going, having perfect musical taste, and beat mining to discover and expose audiences to the rarest of grooves. In rap, emcees work their words so succinctly and rhythmically that they create new syncopations while exhibiting their lyrical mastery, razor-sharp intellect, and often their ability to freestyle, or spontaneously create. In any of the hip-hop elements originality and uniqueness were prized above all else. People took great pride in their material possessions and appearances. Shabazz explains that, "when the '80s came around, fashion was really booming. Nike was introduced. Excessive jewelry was the craze… I remember brothers walking around with toothbrushes just to keep their Pumas clean. (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

This quest for flavor and individuation was also found in clothing fashion, which allowed youth to express their personalities through style. Color was used in creatively irreverent ways, jewelry was large and flashy, sneakers were clean and bright, and youth

took great pride in their appearances. Dressing became a form of creative expression for youth with few extracurricular resources. The blackout of 1977 and the looting that ensued meant that many youth had commandeered access to commodities that had formerly been unaffordable. The 1980s in mainstream culture were also a time of conspicuous consumption and the flaunting of wealth, and although marginalized youth did not hold the resources, they appropriated it in the form of oversized jewelry, expensive sneakers, and other symbols of upper-class taste. As scholar Tricia Rose explains, "Hip-hop has always been articulated via commodities and engaged in the revision of meanings attached to them." (Rose 1994: 41) She also talks about the importance of creating your own style, as well as "self-naming as a form of reinvention and self-definition." (Rose 1994: 36) Much like Jamel Shabazz, who purposefully changed his last name, a great majority of hip-hop practitioners chose aliases that reflected their style, worldview, unique skills and sensibilities.

The slippery nature of hip-hop fashion is that it was so quickly and completely appropriated by white middle and upper-class youth, who then used fashion as a way to feel included in what had originally been black and brown working class culture. (Fleetwood 2006: 326) What many participants called the cannibalization of hip-hop began to give real profits to manufacturers, and as a result, hip-hop style became much more commoditized and increasingly less original. When *Back in the Days* was published in 2001, fashion became overly commercialized, and the stylistic vanguard were inspired by the photos of Jamel Shabazz, which documented the unique fashions that characterized hip-hop's early days. Shabazz's images represented the creativity that had been leached out of hip-hop after two decades of mainstream appropriation. This popularization of the retro styles seen in Shabazz's photos was not without its dangers, however. As in other forms of black popular culture, white consumers appropriated hip-hop fashion.

> Such stylistic innovation was also highly attractive to white Americans—and indeed to non-black people globally—who then copied and imitated such styles and, in the process, drained them of exclusively "black" content and detached them from their initial meanings as covert or encoded signifiers of resistance. (Mercer 2005: 146)

The Assassination of the Black Male Image[5]

New York in the 1980s was economically, physically, and emotionally difficult for minority communities. Young black and Latino men were often blamed implicitly for rising crime rates without much investigation into the systemic causes like economic marginalization. The city faced record deficits, social services were cut, and President Reagan's conservative policies and "trickle down economics" left black and Latino communities with very few resources. (Rose 1994: 1-20) Gang violence in the 1970s and early 1980s terrorized communities, and was a constant subject for public debate, Hollywood representation, and political posturing. Hip-hop culture actually rose in opposition to gang life. Former gang members who were fed up with the violence and tired of fearing for their lives when they crossed city blocks started hip-hop as an alternative to gang life. (Chang 2005: 102) Rather than engage in destructive warfare, hip-hop crews replaced gangs that battled for skills rather than territory, encouraging a healthy and less destructive sense of competition that allowed the culture to thrive and be innovate beyond imaginable limits. This energy, combined with the ingenuity of technologically inclined youth, was able to create and redefine how music was produced in some very revolutionary ways.

Hip-hop's power in New York City in the 1980s cannot be understated. Between the explosion of graffiti, which left no subway car untouched, and the imposing sound of

[5] This is also the title of a book by Earl Ofari Hutchinson, published 1994.

bass-heavy beats, residents and politicians felt that they had lost control of the city. The resulting "wars" on drugs, graffiti, and crime all targeted the youth of minority populations. Media representations of black youth justified police brutality and created a fear of young black males in the public imagination, and Hip-hop became the scapegoat for many social ills.

> In the context or race and masculinity, authenticity imbues the subject with a mythic sense of virility, danger, and physicality; in representations of hip-hop, authenticity most often manifests itself through the body of the young black male who stands in for the "urban real." (Fleetwood 2006: 327)

The gaze of others, especially through the lens of the media had a compounded affect for people like those in Jamel Shabazz's 1980s New York portraits, who were almost exclusively Black and Latino members of the working-class. Many were struggling to make a living, but you could never tell by these photographs. Men and women dressed to a tee, sometimes sporting the latest fashions, and always presenting themselves with pride and confidence. Social scientists tried to make sense of this 'cool pose' which was also the title of an important book that theorized the black male pose as a survival mechanism and coping strategy in the face of white racism. (Majors 1992) The theory made sense, but it was overly simplistic, framing black men as reactionary victims stripped of all agency. Still, the premise was valuable and perceptive in other ways.

> Cool pose furnishes the black male with a sense of control, inner strength, balance, stability, confidence, and security…Cool helps him deal with the closed doors and negative images of himself that he must confront on a daily basis. It may represent one of the richest untapped areas for understanding black male behavior today. (Majors 1992: 9)

Considering the particular challenges black males face, both ideologically and in the real world—where they are profiled by law enforcement and suspected just for their race and

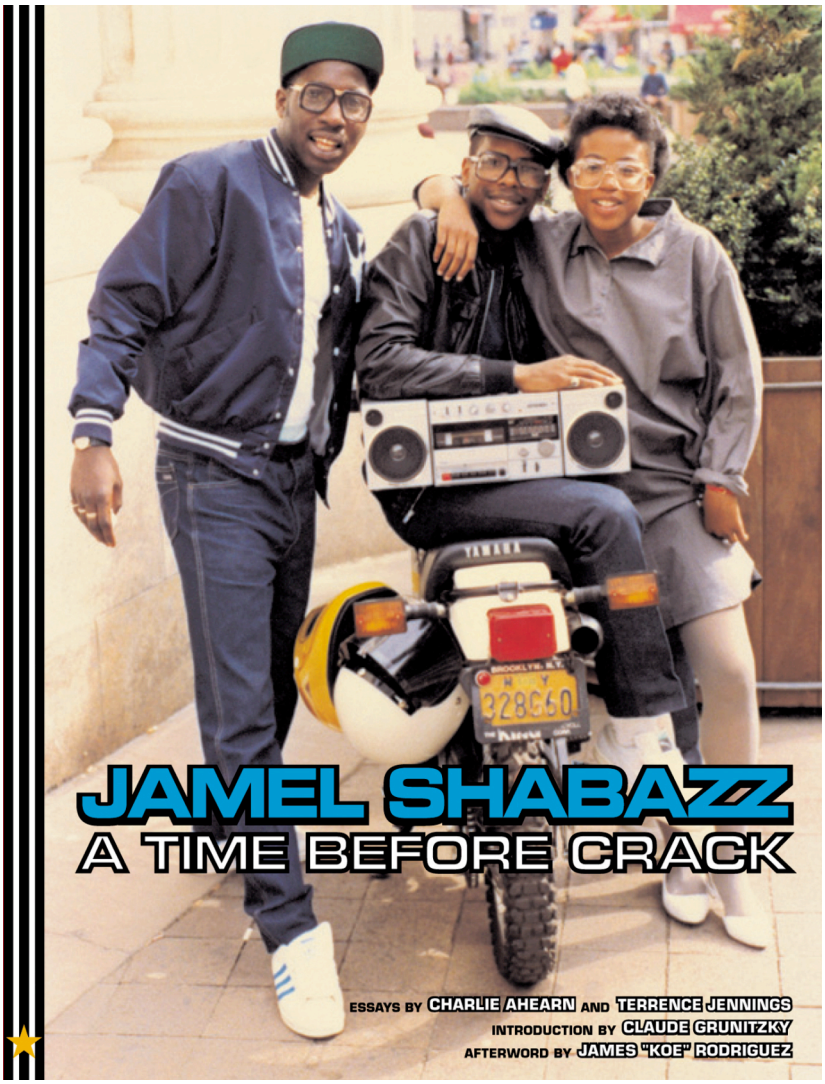
gender—this idea of the pose as a defense mechanism makes sense. There is another aspect though, and that is what is captured in Jamel Shabazz's photographs. His subjects do not see themselves as victims, and in their pose is something deeper than a survival strategy. It is a profound sense of self-respect and pride.

A series of social science reports published in the 1980s were built on the tenets of the infamous 1965 Moynihan Report which gave credence to ideas like a "culture of poverty" that spawned the "war on drugs" and other sound-byte friendly policies that terrorized black and brown communities in New York City. Much of social science research in this period tended to explain black cultural practices as survival mechanism in the face of racism, over-policing, underemployment, and nihilism without acknowledging the many levels of agency exerted by individuals and groups to define their experience on their own terms. Robin D.G. Kelly explains:

> Without a concept of, or even an interest in, aesthetics, style, and the visceral pleasures of cultural forms, it should not be surprising that most social scientists explained black urban culture in terms of coping mechanisms, rituals, or oppositional responses to racism. And trapped by an essentialist interpretation of culture, they continue to look for that elusive 'authentic' ghetto sensibility, the true, honest unbridled, pure cultural practices that capture the raw, ruffneck 'reality' of urban life… The biggest problem with the way social scientists employ the culture concept in their studies of the black urban poor is their inability to see what it all means to the participants and practitioners. (Kelly 2004: 131)

Jamel Shabazz's work has become important precisely because it offers the perspective that Kelly alludes to above. The images were created for the pleasure of their subjects and the photographer, without concern for mainstream public opinion. Beyond the joy that they brought to their subjects, the photographs give insight into a private reality that offers an alternate reading of history—a privileged view that only could be provided by

Jamel Shabazz, whose dedication to his craft and love for his people allowed a more honest representation that challenged what historical memory claimed to "know" about the 1980s. Seeing such intimate photos of individuals who had been set up to be feared, with glimmers of love in their eyes, fundamentally challenged representations of black and Latino youth as Others. Being one among them, Jamel Shabazz was able to represent black youth as equals, understanding their core values, issues, and the challenges that they faced, and earning their trust in order to capture their spirit in the way that they wanted to represent it. Shabazz did not steal pictures from a distance with a telephoto lens; he engaged every single one of his subjects. Sometimes people would decline to be photographed, but he still took the time to talk to them and explain his intention. He was attracted to individuals who felt good about themselves, people who were not afraid to project their power and agency onto the world. He was not afraid to create bonds with strangers, understanding that his subjects were angels on the road to life who had entered his path for a reason. Always in the forefront of his mind was positivity and uplift, representing individuals one at a time, while knowingly creating a portrait of his people. For Shabazz, working with such intense dedication, photographing so many hundreds of people, clearly brought him great joy. Indeed, he enjoyed the process and understood in a very deep way that his work would somehow have an impact that would reach beyond his individual subjects. The immediacy of bringing joy to those who posed for him, seeing his images in family homes and albums was part of his motivation, but even deeper, Shabazz's discipline and focus point to a real understanding of the historical value of his photographs.



A Time Before Crack

The cover image of Shabazz's book, above, memorializes a feeling of happiness, love, and community, which were destroyed by the influx of drugs in the 1980s. Far beyond the quickly co-opted, fashion-inspired uses of Jamel Shabazz's work, his dedication stemmed in part from seeing the devastation inflicted by crack cocaine Fighting not only the tribulations of economic hardship, but also the psychological burden of being blamed for crime and nihilism, many of the subjects of Shabazz's pictures fell victim to the crack epidemic that ravaged urban America in the mid to late 1980s. Rather than depict

communities falling apart at the seams, Jamel Shabazz represented pride, happiness, and dignity in his subjects as a kind of homage to those whose lives were destroyed by this very powerful and potent drug. The title of his second book, *A Time Before Crack* (2005), evokes the objective to represent life before the drug epidemic destroyed the social fabric of black working class communities. It was bold to include the word "crack" in the title, because of its heavy and negative connotation, but Shabazz insisted because he felt a need to speak the truth about the damage that crack had done to black and Latino communities, including teenage addiction, babies born with drug dependency, and increases in HIV infection. Jamel Shabazz saw the real world consequences of these statistics, and he took extra care to edit his book with care and respect, because sadly many of his subjects fell victim to drug addiction. In his words, "This project has granted me the opportunity not only to preserve history, but to also give those who stood in front of my camera the chance to see themselves and their peers, in a time before crack." (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

With the massive amounts of cocaine smuggled into the United States at the time, dealers began mixing powder cocaine with baking soda and water to create a smokeable form of cocaine that gave users a sense of euphoria within seconds, followed by a hard crash that left them wanting more. By the mid 1980s, news publications such as *Time* and *Newsweek* used the expression "crack epidemic." Their journalists were writing regular exposés on the subject and reported double-digit increases in addiction rates, which had a dramatic effect on public services. In an effort to curb the sale and consumption of the drug, the Reagan administration passed laws that made it a felony to sell just five grams of crack cocaine. Consequently, this resulted in much harsher sentencing for crack users, who were more often black, than for powder cocaine users, who were more often white. The social costs were devastating. By 1990, it was reported that one out of every four young

black men was in prison, jail, probation or parole.[6] Young women also became casualties, and their crack-addicted babies became heartbreaking feature stories on the nightly news. Young men turned drug dealers were making thousands of dollars a week, employing whole networks of children to serve the "drug industry" by acting as runners and lookouts. Those thousands who were arrested on crack cocaine charges began to flood the penal system, where Jamel Shabazz was employed as a corrections officer. Seeing the results of the crack epidemic on these young people's lives turned Shabazz into an activist and crusader, determined to provide the men and women he photographed on his spare time with the inspiration and wisdom to keep them out of trouble: "I knew that crack was coming, I saw the dark cloud, I saw the guns coming, the escalation in gang violence, and I wanted to use my camera to save a generation." (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

The challenges for Black and Latino youth in 1980s New York were in many cases insurmountable. Murder rates, incarceration rates, health statistics, and other social indicators were stacked against them.[7] The media took its cues from these sociological statistics and thus reaffirmed them by portraying youth of color as menaces to society in newspaper and magazine articles, advertising, nightly news broadcasts, sitcoms, and films.

> Representing ghetto youth as dangerous is not simply a symbolic exercise; it has serious implications for social policy and also influences the social control mechanisms put in place to restore a sense of order…One of the most striking ironies of late twentieth-century capitalism is the simultaneous structural and economic displacement of black youth along with the emergence of a voracious appetite for the cultural performances and products created by them. (Watkins 2004: 564)

---

[6] Sentencing Project, "Young Black Men and the Criminal Justice System: A Growing National Problem" (Washington D.C.: Sentencing Project, 1990.

[7] New York Times, September 19, 1999, "Crack's Legacy."

Jamel Shabazz's legacy lies in the hundreds of youth that he has mentored over the years. It is not easy to approach strangers and ask them if they want to be photographed. It is particularly difficult to do so when those individuals know that they are considered outcasts, or even dangers to society. In New York, Shabazz teaches with the Rush Philanthropic Foundation, puts on workshops at the Bronx Museum, and works in the city's public schools. His unique style, vision, and compassion have brought him to the attention of the Soros Foundation, who has included his images in "Reframing the Story of Black Males in the Media," an initiative which seeks to answer the following question: With the election of the first African American president, how can philanthropy encourage media to provide more accurate, nuanced portrayals of black men and boys?

Hip-Hop Photography: Reframing the Past

Clearly, Shabazz was not the only photographer documenting hip-hop in the 1980s, and he is one of a handful of photographers who have built their reputations on the hip-hop related work they did some thirty years ago. Photography and representations of hip-hop have been critically important throughout the history of this social and cultural movement, which has relied on images to create and invent itself. In the 1980s, photographs of the culture printed on music album covers and in the media greatly contributed to hip-hop's national and global growth. Some photographers became keenly aware of the importance of the movement they were documenting, while others lived through the 1980s making photographs of their personal experiences that would later become iconic. Photographs were often the only record of the brilliantly painted graffiti masterpieces that crossed the five boroughs of New York, spreading the movement and making an important symbolic claim on the city. With rap music, visual representations on party flyers and album covers were vital in forging the identities and popularity of rappers. Photography of hip-hop in the 1980s helped to shape what hip-hop meant to the youth who created and consumed it, to the

institutions that tried to control it, and to the public at large. In the 1980s, beyond representing hip-hop's traditional elements of rap—deejaying, breaking, and graffiti—photography also served as a kind of historical record that ended up being revisited two decades later in a somewhat romantic and nostalgic move aimed at defining what "authentic" hip-hop culture was when it first emerged.

Back in the Days was one among several photography books to be published after the year 2000, as for example Janette Beckman's *The Breaks* (2007) David Allan Harvey's *Living Proof* (2007), a second edition of Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant's *Subway Art* (2009), and Joe Conzo's *Born in the Bronx* (2007). Earlier books of note included works by Ricky Powell and Ernie Paniccioli. Just like in academia, where hip-hop courses and literature abounded, the publishing industry recognized this deep-seated nostalgia for photographs of hip-hop culture and responded by seeking out titles that would satisfy a market niche. Powerhouse Books, who also published all of Jamel Shabazz's monographs, quickly established its hip-hop collection by publishing all but one of the books listed above, which offer different insights into hip-hop culture.

Originally published in 1984, Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant's *Subway Art* was the first photography based book to ever be published about hip-hop culture. It specifically dealt with graffiti. Methodical and inspired, the book has become the stuff of legend among hip-hop aficionados, and its 25-year anniversary republication (2009) was recently celebrated with much fanfare in New York. In her book *The Breaks* (2007), Janette Beckman's vibrant portraits of early hip-hop artists bring some of the legends to life, including more obscure names that had transformative hits but may not have been remembered by the annals of history. A British photographer who had worked extensively on the punk rock subculture, Beckman immediately took to hip-hop for its countercultural tendencies and raw expression. The result is impressive. Taking an editorial style, photographer David Allan Harvey published a hip-hop book called *Living Proof* (2007),

which is a photographic essay about hip-hop created over the course of several years for the *National Geographic* magazine. Harvey photographed the personal lives of two aspiring rappers and of celebrities. He traveled to Africa, Thailand, Spain, and France to photograph hip-hop in these countries.

The only other non-white photographer to publish a book at the time was Joe Conzo, whose images in *Born in the Bronx* (2007) are a fantastic historical record of hip-hop's early days. It gives the viewer a sense of the grassroots efforts that lead to the artistic creation by youth with tons of talents but few resources. Conzo, who is of Puerto Rican descent, attended high school with many of hip-hop's earliest pioneers. His photographs are full of the energy of the youth and the excitement of the time. His grandmother was a well known civil and community rights activist in the Bronx, and much like Jamel Shabazz, he has a strong sense of social responsibility that stems from his personal experience with racism and discrimination.

> I come from a very proud family, a very proud culture. So when you have outside entitles portraying your culture in a negative way, you want to do the opposite. You want to fight against that, you want to document the positive aspects of life. Despite the devastation, we made the best of it in the Bronx. (Conzo interview 2008)

Conzo's and Shabazz's photographs, when compared to the work of Cooper, Beckman, and Harvey, would suggest that photographers of color may have a particular sense of responsibility in representing their communities. While the latter rose to prominence much earlier and developed full-fledged photography careers, both Conzo and Shabazz worked regular jobs as emergency medical technician and corrections officer, respectively. Their photographs offered an intimate look into the lives of both black and Latino communities that were made possible by their dedication and sociocultural ties.

When compared to all the books published in this recent wave of hip-hop nostalgia, Jamel Shabazz's *Back in the Days* stands out for a number of reasons. Since his images were not originally intended for commercial purposes and were not made to sell anything like record covers or magazines, Shabazz's photos have an aura of authenticity. They are documents, but they feel like much more, because he had an obvious artistic intent. He instigated the majority of these photographs. He was not hired to shoot but did it out of a love for the craft and the process, and his knack for portraiture and gaining trust from his subjects is a gift not granted to many. He also allowed his subjects to present themselves to the camera, giving us a non-proscriptive view of life from his and his subjects' perspective, one that was not based on curiosity, or that stemmed from a need to explain or understand. He allowed his subjects the right to "opacity" which is the right to not be fully understood and put under a microscope for public consumption. (Glissant 1990: 189) Ultimately, as much as they bare their souls through their eyes, Shabazz's subjects are somehow reserved and unknowable. Much like his subjects, Jamel Shabazz is reserved, humble and dignified. These qualities are what imbue his photographs with such nostalgic power. They refute negative stereotypes but in very subtle ways.

The Limits of Hip-Hop

As much as he acknowledges that his success is invariably tied to hip-hop culture, he refuses to be labeled a "hip-hop photographer" and rejects the limitations that this category would imply. In fact, "hip-hop" did not exist at the time he was photographing it, and he claims a multitude of cultural, musical, and stylistic influences that are not limited to rap. Shabazz believes that his work is often misinterpreted. He often complains that at many of his exhibition openings—which are always accompanied with music—the only music the deejays play is hip-hop. Such a narrow reading of his work and influences misses the larger point: Shabazz's musical references include soul, Latin jazz, reggae, and popular

music from the 1970s and 1980s. Rap music was not widely played on the radio when Shabazz was working – hip-hop culture was just beginning to be defined and commodified. To make it clear, he now includes playlists of songs that inspired him in his books, and he is more proactive about what types of music are played at his shows.

> The term ”hip-hop photographer,” it limits me. And I can’t accept that because in all actuality, I haven’t been given opportunities to document hip-hop artists, so I can’t agree with that title…I’m not just a hip-hop photographer, I am a photographer who loves his people. (Shabazz interview with author 2008)

CHAPTER V

DIASPORA AESTHETICS

> Following the model of the Black diaspora traditions of music, athletics, and rhetoric, Black cultural workers must constitute and sustain discursive and institutional networks that deconstruct earlier modern Black strategies for identity formation, demystify power relations that incorporate class, patriarchal, and homophobic biases, and construct more multivalent and multidimensional responses that articulate the complexity and diversity of Black practices in the modern and post modern world. (West 1993: 212)

Since the millennium, new frameworks for black popular culture are based on what some have called diaspora aesthetics—a transcultural brew of convergences, interdisciplinary discourses, and a fundamentally optimistic worldview that celebrates blackness but never fixes it to an African root. Theoretically based in postmodernism and cultural studies scholarship of the 1990s, this contemporary moment places popular culture and visual studies at the core of its inquiry. Truly interdisciplinary, much of the scholarship and critical theory of this era is based in conversations between critics and artists, conferences and roundtables, exhibitions and museums, alternative and public spaces.

Hip-hop culture has a particularly strong appeal to this Diaspora aesthetic, because it represents the mixing and recontextualizing of many different cultures: black American, Jamaican, Puerto Rican, African, but also Chicano, Asian, and others. Black power, Kung Fu films, funk, Jamaican sound systems, Japanese technology, gang culture, salsa and dance—hip-hop is fundamentally multidisciplinary and intercultural. Now with hip-hop's global reach, the influences and reconfigurations are endless, as youth in every corner of the world incorporate and amend hip-hop culture to satisfy their local realities.

Jamel Shabazz's work has fit into this new framework for a number of reasons. First, his appeal to the taste of the art and style conscious has reinvigorated the discourse on fashion. Second, his representation of hip-hop is multicultural and acknowledges the many influences on its development. Third, this moment is photo-centric, and Shabazz's images are aesthetically engaging. He has also managed to appeal to a nostalgic sense of authenticity while tapping into a Diaspora aesthetic.

Shabazz's photographs are often shown alongside African photographers because there is an uncanny stylistic continuity between them. Malian photographer Malick Sidibé is particularly important to the discussion of Jamel Shabazz's work, because although they were working decades apart and on two different continents, the energy and spirit of their photography is comparable.[8] Sidibé and Shabazz are often exhibited in conjunction, because they both captured the vibrancy of each particular cultural moment. For Sidibé it was 1960s Bamako, and for Shabazz it was 1980s New York City. Scholar and film critic Manthia Diawara, who grew up in Mali in the 1960s, wrote about a "Diaspora aesthetic" that "was defined beyond the national boundary and it united black youth through a common habitus of black pride, civil rights and self-determination." (Diawara 2005: 254) In the same article, Diawara writes about Malick Sidibé but also about James Brown, who revolutionized popular African culture in the 1960s. Interestingly, James Brown is also a foundational figure in hip-hop, which links Shabazz and Sidibé in another very subtle but powerful way. Sidibé was a portrait photographer who worked both in the studio and on the streets, and his photos reveal the pulse of a newly post-colonial Mali full of vibrancy and anticipation of freedom and change. Shabazz's photos reflect a similar pride and energy at a time when black cultural productivity and creativity was peaking in fashion and music.

---

[8] Foundation Cartier published a large-format catalogue of Sidibé's work with a forward by Andre Magnin in 1995. Also see Michelle Lamuniere, *You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé*, Yale University Press, 2001.

Brooklyn as a Cultural Powerhouse

At the millennium, Brooklyn was ripe with a multi-ethnic vanguard of young artists creating a sense of community and vibrancy that has been referred to as a renaissance.[9] A dearth of new artists, institutions like the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Diaspora Arts, and especially the publishing house Powerhouse Books, which became the premier arbiter of the new stylistic movement, were fueling this optimistic and internationalist climate. The cultural vanguard was well traveled, Diaspora oriented, highly educated and very involved in the creation of popular culture in magazines, art galleries, and advertising agencies. In many ways, Brooklyn has begun to replace or rather complement Harlem as the cultural capital of black America. For example, "A Great Day in Harlem" is the title of a famous photograph made by photographer Art Kane in 1957 of prominent jazz musicians and artists in Harlem. In 2009, Jamel Shabazz was commissioned to photograph A Great Day in Brooklyn with a similar purpose – to bring the arts and cultural workers together for a group portrait.[10]

An important catalyst of this era was Claude Grunitzky, born in 1971, the founder of the True Agency and *Trace* magazine, and the author of *Transculturalism: How the World is coming together* (2004). The son of the Togolese ambassador to the United States who holds two passports and speaks six languages, Grunitzky grew up outside of Washington D.C. surrounded by an international and highly educated group of friends. He was soon sent to a boarding school just outside of Paris, where he where he became a hip-hop aficionado. After studying political science in France, he moved to London where he became a music writer. Soon after, he moved to New York, where he became an important

[9] From the Guggenheim exhibition, It Came from Brooklyn, 2009 http://flavorwire.com/31807/it-came-from-brooklyn-interview-the-walkmen-leo-allen

[10] The results can be seen at: http://agreatdayinbrooklyn.org/

figure in a new millennial arts movement that has made some major impacts on global popular culture. Grunitzky was one of the first to publish Jamel Shabazz's work as editor of Trace magazine, and he organized the first major exhibition of his photography in Paris in 1999.[11] Grunitzky was what writer Trey Ellis called a "cultural mulatto" in his often-cited essay on the New Black Aesthetic. (Ellis 1988) This movement was comprised of highly educated, middle and upper class black artists and writers who were refusing to limit themselves to essentialist notions of race. Intended as a kind of post-racial manifesto, Ellis celebrated the new vanguard that was able to draw on black cultural history but not be limited by it.

Grunitzky's most powerful intervention was his reconfiguration of the Fernando Ortiz concept of "transculturation," which was inserted in the title of his 2004 anthology called *Transculturalism: How the World is Coming Together* (2001). A collection of essays, artworks, and interviews with some of the most compelling artists, musicians, intellectuals, curators, models, agents, actors, directors, and entrepreneurs working around the year 2000, *Transculturalism* expands the possibilities of how contemporary culture is understood. Jamel Shabazz's essay "Spanish Fly," which describes the Latino and Caribbean influences on hip-hop culture, was included in the volume. In the introduction, Grunitzky lays out his premise.

> At its core, we will explore how certain curious, open-minded people manage, through perseverance and affinity, to adapt to new, alien cultures…These people are "transculturalists" and their experiences—not to mention the results of the 2000 census—show that in the future it will become increasingly difficult to identify and separate people according to previously accepted delineations. In essence, we are

[11] True Signs Galerie Beaurepaire, Paris, France

> saying that transculturalism defies race, religion, sexuality, class and every sort of classification known to sociologists and marketers. (Grunitzky 2004: 25)

Clearly, this movement did not deny market forces, but rather engaged them, challenged them, and created several successful marketing campaigns as a result for brands ranging from Levis to Mercedes-Benz. Jamel Shabazz benefited greatly from this niche market, which appreciated his photography for its impeccable sense of style. Grunitzky's agency also orchestrated the Puma sponsorship for the 30 Americans show at the Rubell Collection in Miami—one of the major blockbuster contemporary black arts exhibitions of the last ten years.[12] The show was important because while all of the artists are black, it dropped the "black" signifier from the title. It also made a very clear link between consumer culture and contemporary art linking the brand Puma, which was imbued with symbolic power in hip-hop, directly to the art world. Further, Puma has developed the Creative Africa forum, where artists, curators, intellectuals, and others can post profiles, research exhibitions and events, and where they can engage in transnational networks.

Developments in Contemporary Art

In the 1990s and even today, many artists and critics have complained that the contemporary art world has not been particularly welcoming to non-white artists, beyond their tokenism. The 1989 exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" exhibit at the Pompidou Center in Paris was a pivotal point that sought to challenge ethnocentric practices in contemporary art. However it was not until 1997 that a black artist, Robert Colescott, was selected to represent the United States at the hyper-prestigious Venice Biennale. Even today, contemporary art has a tendency to ghettoize artists of many cultural backgrounds, usually organizing one blockbuster exhibition of black or other ethnic minorities every few

[12] "30 Americans" presented December 3, 2008-May 30, 2009 at the Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

years, and then corralling the artists back to obscurity. Olu Oguibe, who wrote the acclaimed book *The Culture Game* (2004), explains the limited opportunity from non-Western backgrounds to be considered in contemporary art.

> Ironically, the contemporary art "world" is one of the last bastions of backwardness in the West today, which makes it an uneven playground, a formidable terrain of difficulty for artists whose backgrounds locate at the receiving end of intolerance…Such slots, it appears, are rationed over ten-year periods, and because the opportunity to display is so rare, it becomes the tendency to seek to remedy the situation by consigning all such work to humongous, inchoate, and badly conceived group or period exhibitions, after which heroic gestures institutions return to their regular, clinical programming, satisfied that they have paid their dues. (Oguibe 2004: xii)

Changing the Game: African-born Curators, Scholars, and Artists

This is changing significantly, however, and more artists of various cultural and national backgrounds are breaking new ground in the contemporary art world, and this is thanks in part to African born curators like Okui Enwezor[13] and Simon Njami, who have organized major international exhibitions in the U.S., Africa, and Europe. Blockbuster exhibitions like Africa Remix[14] curated by Njami who is of Cameroonian descent, included 88 artists. It toured the world with stops in the U.S., Europe, and South Africa. The Bamako Biennale of photography has taken place every two years since 1994, and it has become a major encounter between African photographers and international contemporary art collectors,

---

[13] *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994.* P.S. 1, New York City, February 10 – May 5, 2002; *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography.* International Center of Photography, NYC March 10-May 28, 2006.

[14] *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Hayward Gallery, London, February 10 – April 17, 2005.

curators, and scholars. The 49th Venice Biennale held in 2001 had an important exhibition titled Authentic/Ex-centric: Africa in and out of Africa[15] curated by Salah Hassan. It included seven artists from The 52nd Venice Biennale and had an African Pavilion in 2007, which presented 30 artists from the Sindika Dokolo Foundation. Dokolo, a wealthy entrepreneur born in 1972 in Kinshasa and raised in Paris, took over in 2001 the family business that includes banking, the commercialization of natural resources, and real estate. Now living in Luanda, Angola, Sindika Dokolo has amassed one of the most impressive African art collections in the world, and publications like *Third Text* challenge the notion of the West as the global arts epicenter.

Okui Enwezor is of particular interest, because most of his scholarship and curatorial work has involved contemporary African photography. A pivotal figure in the contemporary art world, Nigerian-born Enwezor is the founding editor of *NKA, the journal of contemporary African art*, and after a string of high profile appointments, he is currently Dean of Academic Affairs and Senior Vice President of the San Francisco Art Institute. He curated the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in 1996, and his landmark 2001 book and exhibition, *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, dealt with not only decolonization, but also explored the intersections of art, politics, and representation in contemporary Africa and in the Diaspora. The exhibit "Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography" took place at the International Center of Photography in New York, and the accompanying book is an invaluable resource that includes the work of more than thirty photographers. (Enwezor 2006) In 2002 Enwezor directed Documenta XI, the most prestigious international art exhibition that takes place in Germany every five years. His nomination was seen as a major turning point for a fair that had previously shown very few African artists. Under Enwezor's leadership, the exhibit

[15] Venice Biennale 2001: http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien49/auth-exc/english.htm

featured photography and video in a more prominent way than in years past. Most significantly, he invited a long list of Diaspora-oriented intellectuals like Stuart Hall, Derek Walcott, Homi Bhabha, Juan Flores, and Isaac Julien for platforms titled "Democracy Unrealized," "Experiments With Truth," "Creolité and Creolization," and "Under Siege: For African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Lagos, Kinshasa."

Dr. Kenneth Montague, a popular Canadian dentist and photography collector of Caribbean descent attended Documenta the year that Enwezor was the director. Montague started Wedge Curatorial Projects in Toronto, which was a critically important venue that showcased Jamel Shabazz's photography. (Wedge curatorial projects: 2007: 9) With a mission to collect photography from the African diaspora, Wedge became a nucleus for black intellectual and artistic at the millennium. Jamel Shabazz's images resonated deeply with Montague, who presented a solo show of Shabazz's work in 2003. That same year, as a result of the exhibition, one of Shabazz's photographs was chosen to be on the cover of the catalogue for CONTACT the reputed Toronto photography festival.

Post-Black Art

In the United States, the idea of "post-black art" was a provocation put forward by curator Thelma Golden, who is director of the Studio Museum in Harlem. In her words, "it's a way to understand how a generation navigated through the history that was their cultural and aesthetic inheritance. (Golden 2005: 15) Her landmark exhibition, Freestyle, acknowledged the tremendous role that hip-hop culture had played in both popular and contemporary art. Still, Golden's intent was not to make hip-hop a central theme. She rather wanted to invoke its enormous presence in contemporary culture and in the lives of the up-and-coming artists that she selected for the exhibition. She also wanted to give young black artists a voice beyond pop culture and in the critical contemporary art worlds. Golden described her post-black art intervention as an intentional rupture that would shift

the conversation from a black arts continuum and open up new paths of conversation about blackness.

> "Post-black" was shorthand for post-black-art, which was shorthand for a discourse that could fill volumes…It was characterized by artists who were adamant about not being labeled as "black" artists, though their work was steeped, in fact, deeply interested, in redefining complex notions of blackness…How would this notion play out in the beginning of the 21st Century? How would black artists make work after the vital political activism of the 1960s, the focused, often essentialist, Black Arts Movement of the 1970s, the theory-derived multiculturalism of the 1980s, and the late globalist expansion of the late 90s? (Golden 2001: 14)

Before taking the directorship at the Studio Museum, Thelma Golden was one of the few black assistant curators at the Whitney Museum of American art, where she curated the landmark 1994 exhibition titled Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art. A incendiary and high-profile exhibition, it reflected Golden's provocative style, and included the images of Robert Mapplethorpe, Jean Michel Basquiat, Lorna Simpson, and others, as well as writings of Kobena Mercer, Valerie Smith, Tricia Rose, Greg Tate, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Despite this post-black intervention, most black artists are still subjected to some of the fundamental tenets of the Black Arts Movement from three decades ago, namely, how does the artist's work improve the lives or consciousness of the mass of black people, the majority of whom are still struggling to get by and facing systemic discrimination despite the election of the nation's first black president.

> Every African American artist I can think of whose work I admire finds some way to signal his or her existential *outsiderness*… We black people always want to know, regardless of our education and family background: What relation does your

work have to the outside where most black people continue to be found everywhere you can look? (Wallace 2009: 28)

When analyzing the staying power of black artists in the contemporary art market, most would agree that the gains made are permanent, and that black artists have more opportunities than ever before to become successful. As Wallace explains, "All inequality hasn't been corrected or addressed but it's obvious that African-American contemporary artists have begun to make a dent in the bottom line of the marketplace, and further, that the marketplace may trump the museum in the end." (Wallace 2009: 25)

Cultural Studies and the Academy: Scholarship and Public Intellectualism

In many ways, the 1990s' cultural studies scholarship has laid the foundation for this new transcultural reality that exploded in popular culture, but its origins were in the social movements that preceded it. An outgrowth of 1960s' activism, area studies like Black, Chicano, Asian, Queer, and Women's Studies programs challenged the status quo. Literary theory became a rich field for cultural studies. Critical anthropology encouraged ethnographers to situate themselves and their subjectivities in their research. Ethnic studies became a rich field for deconstructing power, and as such, popular culture was taken into serious consideration. (Hall 1992; Gilroy 1991; hooks 1992; West 1990) By understanding the power wielded by images, and by exposing how regimes of repression worked in subconscious ways to undermine movements for genuine equality regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual preference, scholars were able to deconstruct and challenge popular representations of difference. (hooks 1992; Hall 1997) Cultural studies scholars often served as public intellectuals – presenting their work in non-traditional formats, like video and teaching in non-traditional academic settings.

The field of British cultural studies in the 1990s was a fruitful academic space for the unpacking of popular culture, and Stuart Hall revolutionized how scholars approached

it. He challenged traditional notions of representation that presupposed that meanings were fixed in time. Hall pushed people to look at how meanings were constructed in popular culture, and believed that the realm of the popular was a rich terrain for understanding the values of society. In his work and teaching, Hall breaks apart the idea that there is a "truth" that exists to be represented. Rather, he understands "representation" as a process that includes any number of readings. The artist's intent is only one aspect of any piece of visual media or art, the meanings created are never fixed, and they are subject to multiple interpretations. Meaning is created within discourse, and it is in a constant process of creation. Popular culture is a very serious subject of inquiry, because it is within the discourses of popular culture— the music, films, magazines, and fashion— that meaning is created. Thus, while hip-hop was originally constructed as an authentic black American art form brimming with violence and misogyny, subsequent readings of Jamel Shabazz's photographs challenge this construction. That is where lies their power. Hip-hop studies have flourished since the turn of the new millennium, because hip-hop music and culture provides a fertile terrain for scholars to talk about race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, politics, economics, and popular culture.

> How things are represented and the "machineries" and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive* and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation— subjectivity, identity, politics-a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life. (Hall 1996a)

Hence, hip-hop culture was just as much created by the media that represented it, especially in video and film. Major record labels controlled this process of representation in the 1990s, which led to a commodification of the culture. At the turn of the millennium, the internet, and ease of travel meant that while the major corporations had control of hip-hop as "pop culture," the underground was alive and well and responding to a variety of stimuli,

including alternative readings of hip-hop culture as represented by the photographs in Jamel Shabazz's book *Back in the Days* (2001).

Stuart Hall also pointed to what he called the end of the essential black subject, which left out the plural histories and experiences of black people while privileging the imagination of one authentic, monolithic, black experience. Transculturalists embraced this idea and celebrated the nuanced differences of how blackness was expressed globally. This individuation of experience was particularly geared to a generation that refused dogmatic ideals of the past and insisted on uniqueness and specificity.

> What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences, and cultural identities which compose the category "black"; that is the recognition that "black" is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature. (Hall 1996b)

Michele Wallace's *Black Popular Culture* (1992) was a book and conference that brought together some of the most visible scholars in the field of African diaspora studies, including Houston Baker, Jr., Jacqueline Bobo, Hazel Carby, Angela Davis, Manthia Diawara, Coco Fusco, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Paul Gilroy, Ada Gay Griffin, Stuart Hall, Thomas Allen Harris, bell hooks, Arthur Jafa, Isaac Julien, Julianne Malveaux, Manning Marble, Marlon T. Riggs, Tricia Rose, Valerie Smith, Greg Tate, Cornel West, Shirley Anne Williams, Margo Jefferson and Judith Wilson. Interested in what would come to be known as the "black postmodern," the project took up a range of issues, but few of the authors dealt explicitly with visual arts. Wallace lamented this in her essay "Why are there no great black artists?" (Wallace 1992)

Postmodernism was the theoretical orientation of the day. Most of the contributors insisted that reality was constructed, and that there was no one truth or one reality, but

rather a multiplicity of subject positions and interpretations, minority scholars were in a privileged position in this era, because they understood fundamentally the breaks or fissures that existed in the mainstream of their respective disciplines or fields of inquiry, from which postmodernism sprung. Often forced to live in two or more worlds, many black American, Indian, Caribbean, and other scholars including those of mixed descent, gained the critical experiences necessary to negotiate the complexities of the postmodern world, so often filled with contradictions:

> Scholars from aggrieved communities can play a particularly important role in solving our present problems, not primarily because of who they are, but rather because of what they and their communities have been forced to learn from the hands dealt to them by history. (Lipsitz 2006: 66)

Another key theoretical foundation was based on the work of esteemed poet and literary critic Edouard Glissant from Martinique, whose poetics of relation and embrace of the rhizomatic principle of culture opened up possibilities for understanding the Diasporic experience. Here again, meaning is never fixed, but rather relational. Whereas a root principle fixes, a rhizome principle accepts that its strength will come from multiple different sources, "an enmeshed root system…with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea or rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root." (Glissant 1990: 11)

Glissant also insists on opacity as a right, and stresses that the act of understanding, especially in the ethnographic sense, "has a fearsome, repressive meaning." (Glissant 1990: 26) Rather than a hybrid mix that blends one into another, Glissant sees multiple cultures co-existing based on mutual respect. This is how black and Latino communities have come together, and this is part of what has placed Jamel Shabazz's work in this overarching intellectual and artistic movement of diaspora aesthetics.

African and Caribbean cultures fed into early hip-hop. But when hip-hop traveled to Europe in the early 1980s, it affected diasporic youth like Claude Grunitzky, who brought Jamel Shabazz to France, and later to Asia, where Shabazz also exhibited his work. Each time the culture travels, it is fed by the places and people it encounters, strengthening its draw and enriching its value as a popular cultural art form that carries the Diaspora with it everywhere it goes. Without denying its inception in the black American experience, diaspora aesthetics pushed hip-hop to embrace its international breadth, and the result has been a flourishing of underground hip-hop that has remained faithful to the optimistic, progressive, socially-conscious foundations of hip-hop culture in just about every corner of the world. As Glissant would explain, "Diversity, the quantifiable totality of every possible difference, is the motor driving universal energy, and it must be safeguarded from assimilations, from fashion passively accepted as the norm, and from standardized customs." (Glissant 1990: 30)

Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) established the African diaspora as fundamental to modernism, and opened up "a philosophical discourse that refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics." (Gilroy 1993: 136) Using the Atlantic Ocean as a metaphor, Gilroy was able to show how people and culture traveled, and how Africans were a critical part of modernity. Rejecting the idea of an African root that trumped all other black experiences, Gilroy was more concerned with how hybridities came to be. He used music as a prime example.

> The power of music in developing our struggles by communicating information, organizing consciousness and testing out, deploying, or amplifying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency—individual and collective, defensive and transformational—demands attention to both the formal attributes of this tradition of expression and its distinctive *moral* basis… In the simplest

> possible terms, by posing the world as it is against the world as the racially subordinated would like it to be, this musical culture supplies a great deal of the courage required to go on living in the present. (Gilroy 1991: 133)

Music is a critical part of Jamel Shabazz's work, so much so that in his monograph, *Seconds of My Life* (2007), song lyrics accompany the photographs. Historically black music, especially the blues and gospel music, has served as a psychological refuge for African Americans who faced the indignities of racism and discrimination. It used music as a source of pleasure, oral history, and positive affirmation. While his work has been most closely identified with hip-hop culture, Shabazz musical inspiration comes from an earlier generation of artists like Gil Scott-Heron, Marvin Gaye, The Isley Brothers, and Natalie Cole. An optimist, Shabazz understands the power that music has to inspire people, and he strives to tap into a similar vein with his photography. Shabazz also rejects the misogyny and violence in rap music, because while he knows that many so-called minorities struggle in their day-to-day lives, record labels and media corporations profit from the violent street-life stories told in rap and affirm the stereotypes that artists have been fighting for decades. Jamel Shabazz explains it this way:

> As a photojournalist, I am duty-bound to document and share the real positivity that exists within my community and others, not just with audiences in the United States, but on a global level. The nonstop stream of negative images projected daily in the media has created a false impression of our world, one that breeds misunderstanding and leads to prejudice. I am not ignorant to the real problems that exist, but I also realize that there is a lot of good in the world that has not been properly represented. (Shabazz 2007)

Because of its place as an economic, commercial, and institutional powerhouse, the United States, and therefore the African American experience came to dominate what has been understood both in the U.S. and sometimes elsewhere as "authentically black." Part of

the driving force to see hip-hop in the continuum of black popular culture was that as black studies became entrenched in U.S. academies as a result of civil rights and black power, Afrocentric philosophies became popular with many academics. Sometimes referred to as identity politics, formerly marginalized groups were intent to making academia more responsive and responsible to minorities. In the case of Afrocentric scholars, they positioned themselves to counter Eurocentrism with Afrocentrism, rejecting the philosophies built upon racism and exploitation while appealing to a mythical past of African sovereignty. By accepting the strict binary of seeing the world in black and white, without leaving room for the many cultural and historical events that shaped their encounters, Afrocentrists often fell back onto essentialism and nationalism in order to fight discrimination and racism, especially at the institutional and academic worlds.[16] Grounded in a root-based, not a rhizome-based philosophy, Afrocentrists connected hip-hop back to Africa— the drum and the griots— and also saw the undeniable lineage between the black arts poetry and rap. Afrocentric scholars were the first to accept and appreciate hip-hop as a culture and an art form, and not just a popular fad. Still, rather than thinking of hip-hop as an African American culture, it is more useful to consider hip-hop as an African diasporic culture that was born within the U.S. black experience. Embracing a rhizomatic principle is helpful for understanding how global cultures like hip-hop have spread all over the world and have managed to maintain their substance while adapting to local realities. If hip-hop is the rhizome that is planted in different international contexts, then it will be natural that each different strand will develop and include its particular cultural history in its growth. Likewise, as African peoples have traveled and been scattered across the globe, each particular community develops its own forms of culture, but all feed into the African diaspora— an ever evolving concept that draws its strength from its diversity.

---

[16] See Carole Boyce Davies "Beyond Unicentricity: Transcultural Black Presences" Research in African Literatures, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Summer 1999).

Photographer Jamel Shabazz has captured but one root, however it fits seamlessly into the rhizomatic Diaspora aesthetic that resonates with communities across the globe looking to hip-hop culture for self-expression, community engagement, and ultimately as a way of life. By connecting with Shabazz's images, those who love hip-hop culture are reminded of its core values, and beyond hip-hop, those who appreciate photography are treated to a highly developed vision based on Shabazz's love of hi people and community. Jamel Shabazz embodies the Diaspora aesthetic in his life and work, and is inspiring a new generation to push their frames of understanding by knowing their past, and working for a brighter future.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Adjaye, Joseph K. and Adrianne R. Andrews. 1997.
Languange, Rhythm, and Sound: Black Popluar Cultures into the 21st Century. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press.

Ahearn, Charlie. 2007.
Wild Style: The Sampler. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Alvim, Fernando, Heike Munder, and Ulf Wuggenig. 2005.
Next Flag: The African Sniper Reader. Zurich: JRP Ringier.

Anderson, Benedict R. 1991.
Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso.

Baker, Houston. 1980.
The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Baker, Houston A., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg, eds. 1996.
Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Barbour, Floyd B. ed. 1970.
The Black Seventies. Boston: Porter Sargent Publisher.

Baruch, Ruth-Marion and Pirkle Jones. 1970.
The Vanguard: A Photographic Essay on the Black Panthers. Boston: Beacon Press.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1994.
Simulacra and Simulation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Translation by Sheila Faria Glaser.

Beckman, Janette. 2007.
The Breaks: Stylin' and Profilin' 1982-1990. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. 1996.
The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective. Durham: Duke University Press.

Berger, John. 1980.
About Looking. New York: Vintage Books.

Bey, Dawoud. 2007.
Class Pictures. New York: Aperture Books.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1994.
The location of culture. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990.
Photography: A Middlebrow Art. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Braithwaite, Deborah Willis. 1993.
VanDerZee: Photographer 1886-1993. Washington: Smithsonian Institute.

Cepeda, Raquel. 2004.
And It Don't Stop! The Best American Hip-Hop Journalism of the Last 25 Years. New York: Faber and Faber, Inc.

Cesaire, Aimé. 1972, 2000.
Discourse on Colonialism. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Chang, Jeff. 2005.
Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Chang, Jeff, ed. 2006.
Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop. New York: Basic Civitas.

Cleaver, Eldridge. 1968.
Soul on Ice. New York: Dell Publishing.

Collins, Lisa Gail and Margo Natalie Crawford. 2006.
New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Cooper, Martha. 2004.
Hip Hop Files: Photographs 1979-1984. Cologne: From Here to Fame Publishing.

Cooper, Martha and Henry Chalfant. 1984.
Subway Art. New York: Owl Books.

Curran, James, David Morely, and Valerie Walkerdine. 1996.
Cultural Studies and Communications. London: Arnold.

Davies, Carole Boyce. 1994.
Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject. New York: Routledge.

Davies, Carole Boyce. 1999.
"Beyond Unicentricity: Transcultural Black Presences." Research in African Literatures, Vol. 30, No. 2, (Summer 1999).

De Cock, Liliane and Reginald McGhee. 1973.
James VanDerZee. New York: Morgan and Morgan Publishers.

DuBois, W.E.B. 1903; 1995.
The Souls of Black Folk. New York: The Modern Library.

During, Simon. 1993.
The Cultural Studies Reader. London: Routledge.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2003.
The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Elam, Harry J. and Kennell Jackson, eds. 2005.
Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Ellis, Trey. 1988, 2003.
Platitutes and The New Black Aesthetic. Ann Arbor: Sheridan Books.

Ellison, Ralph. 1952, 1992.
Invisible man. New York: Modern Library.

Emery, Andrew. 2004.
The Book of Hip Hop Cover Art. London: Octopus Publishing Group.

Enwezor, Okwui. 2006.
Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography. Gottingen: Steidl.

Erikson, Peter.
"The Black Atlantic in the Twenty-First Century: Artistic Passages, Circulations, Revisions. NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art. Number 24.

Evans, Jessica and Stuart Hall. 1999.
Visual Culture: The Reader. London: Sage Publications.

Fanon, Frantz. 1967.
Black Skin, White Masks. New York: Grove Press.

Forman, Murray. 2002.
The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Freed, Leonard. 1968.
Black in White America. New York: Grossman Publishers.

Fusco, Coco and Brian Wallis. 2003.
Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self. New York: Henry F. Abrams Inc Publishers.

Gayle, Addison. 1972.
The Black Aesthetic. New York: Doubleday and Company.

Gilroy, Paul. 1993.
The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness. London: Verso.

Gilroy, Paul. 1995.
Roots and Routes: Black Identity as an Outernational Project. In *Racial and Ethnic Identity: Psychological Development and Creative Expression.* Ed. Herbert W. Harris, Howard C. Blue, and Erza E.H. Griffith, pp. 15030. New York: Routledge.

Gilroy, Paul, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie. 2000.
Without Guarantees: In Honor of Stuart Hall. London: Verso.

Gilssant, Edouard. 1990. 1997.
Poetics of Relation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Golden, Thelma. 2001.
Freestyle. New York: Studio Museum Harlem.

Golden, Thelma. 2005.
Frequency. New York: Studio Museum Harlem.

Grunitzky, Claude. 2004.
Transculturalism: How the World is Coming Together. New York: True Agency Inc.

Guggenheim Museum. 1996.
In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Guillory, Monique and Richard C. Green. 1998.
Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure. New York: New York University Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1996.
Critical Dialouges in Cultural Studies. London: Routledge.

Hall, Stuart and Mark Sealy. 2001.
Different: Contemporary Photographers and Black Identity. London: Phaidon.

Harvey, David Alan. 2007.
Living Proof. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Hebdige, Dick. 2002.
Subculture the meaning of style. London: Routledge.

Hintzen, Percy C. and Jean Muteba Rahier, eds. 2003.
Problematizing Blackness: Self-Ethnographies by Black Immigrants to the United States. New York: Routledge.

hooks, bell. 1992.
Black Looks: Race and Representation. Boston: South End Press.

hooks, bell. 1994.
Outlaw Culture. London: Routledge.

Hutchinson, Earl Ofari. 1994.
The Assassination of the Black Male Image. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Kasfir, Signey Littlefield. 1999.
Contemporary African Art. London: Thames and Hudson.

Kelley, Robin D.G. 1994.
Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class. New York: The Free Press.

Krims, Adam. 2000.
Rap music and the poetics of identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kugelberg, Johan and Joe Conzo. 2007.
Born in the Bronx: A Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip-Hop. New York: Rizzoli.

Lamuniere, Michelle. 2001.
You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibe. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lewis, Samella A. 1990.
Art: African American. Los Angeles: Hancraft Studios.

Lipsitz, George. 2006.
The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Long, Elizabeth, ed. 1997.
From Sociology to Cultural Studies: New Perspectives. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Lyman, Stanford M. 1972.
The Black American in Sociological Though: A Failure of Perspective. New York: Capricorn Books.

Magnin, Andre. 2005.
African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection. London: Merrell.

Majors, Robert. 1992.
Cool Pose: The Dilemas of Black Manhood in America. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Mercer, Kobena. 1994.
Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies. London: Routledge.

Mercer, Kobena. 2003.
James VanDerZee. London: Phaidon Press.

Millstein, Barbara Head. 2001.
Committed to the Image: Contemporary Black Photographers. London: Merrell Publishers Limited.

Mitchel, Tony, ed. 2001.
Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA. Middletown: Welseyan University Press.

Montague, Kenneth. 2007.
Flava: Wedge Curatorial Projects 1997-2007. Toronto: Wedge Curatorial Projects.

Moten, Fred. 2003.
In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Napier, Winston, ed. 2000.
African American Literary Theory: A Reader. New York: New York University Press.

Neal, Mark Anthony. 2002.
Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic. New York: Routledge.

Neal, Mark Anthony. 2006.
New Black Man. New York: Routledge.

Njami, Simon. 2005.
Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers.

Nuttal, Sarah, ed. 2006.
Ugly, Beautiful: African and Diaspora Aesthetics. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ogbar, Jeffery O.G. 2007.
Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Oguibe, Olu. 2004.
The Culture Game. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ortiz, Fernando. 1950, 1996.
La Africania de la Musica Folklorica de Cuba. La Habana: Letras Cubanas.

Paniccioli, Ernie and Kevin Powell, ed. 2002.
Who Shot Ya? Three Decades of Hiphop Photography. New York: HarperCollins.

Parks, Gordon. 1990.
Voices in the Mirror. New York: Doubleday

Parks, Gordon. 1997.
Half Past Autumn: A Retrospective. Boston: Bulfinch Press.

Potter, Russell A. 1995.
Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Powell, Richard J., 2002.
Black art: a cultural history. London: Thames & Hudson.

Powell, Ricky. 1998.
Oh Snap!: The Rap Photography of Ricky Powell. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Reed, Eli. 1997.
Black in America. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Rodriguez, Joseph. 2004.
Juvenile. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Rose, Tricia. 1994.
Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Rubell Family Collection. 2009.
30 Americans. Miami: Rubell Family Collection.

Schoener, Allon. 1995.
Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968. New York: New Press.

Schoonmaker, Trevor. 2008.
Barkley Hendricks: Birth of the Cool. Durham: Duke University Press.

Shabazz, Jamel. 2001.
Back in the Days. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Shabazz, Jamel. 2003.
The Last Sunday in June. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Shabazz, Jamel. 2005.
A Time Before Crack. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Shabazz, Jamel. 2007.
Seconds of My Life. Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books.

Shames, Steven. 2006.
The Black Panthers: Photographs by Stephen Shames. New York: Aperture Books.

Shawcross, Nancy M. 1997.
Roland Barthes: On Photography. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Spring, Chris. 2008.
Angaza Africa: African Art Now. London: Lawrence King Publishing Ltd.

Wallace, Michele. 1992.
Black Popular Culture. New York: The New Press.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. 1981, 2005.
Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. Oxford: James Currey Ltd.

Weheliye, Alexander G. 2005.
Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity. Durham: Duke University Press.

Willis, Deborah. 1994.
Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography. New York: New Press.

Willis, Deborah. 2000.
Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 t the Present. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Willis, Deborah. 2004.
Black: A Celebration of Culture. New York: Hylas Publishing.

Willis, Deborah. 2005.
Family, History, Memory: Recording African American Life. New York: Hylas Publishing.

Wright, Richard. 1940.
Native Son. New York: Harper and Row.

Wright, W.D. 1997.
Black Intellectuals, Black Cognition, and A Black Aesthetic. London: Praeger.