The Eyes Have It

A comparison of the ‘participatory’ and ‘observational’ modes in the field of the photographic representation of African Americans

Master Film & Photographic Studies

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Supervisor: M.A. de Ruiter

Word count: 20,121

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The portrayal of African Americans in mainstream media has subjected us to a succession of images which depict poverty, crime, violence and suffering but omit the circumstances of quotidian life which lie beneath the stereotypes of towns in Northern America. An example of this is the depiction of Watts, a small town on the outskirts of Los Angeles. In 1944, as part of a large-scale public housing project, 498 single-family houses were built there and, by the 1950s, the majority of residents were African Americans from the Southern States. Imperial Courts, together with the surrounding districts, soon became a black ghetto[1]. In 1965, rising anger at social injustice culminated in the notorious Watts rebellion and race rioting. The subsequent years were characterised by racial and economic inequality which fed a latent anger that was to erupt again in 1992. The unrest began on April 29 after a jury found four Los Angeles Police Department officers not guilty of the beating of Rodney King, an African American man. There was video evidence of the beating and as this videotape spread throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area, fury spilled over into the streets, resulting in five days of rioting. While the ocular proof seemed compelling, Jody David Armour, a criminal justice and law professor at the University of Southern California, has described how "..we saw a verdict that told us we couldn't trust our lying eyes"[2]. The reaction in Watts was particularly violent and a curfew was imposed. This curfew was lifted on May 4 and residents slowly returned to their daily routines. Yet the issues which led to the Rodney King riots have still not been resolved and, after numerous incidences of arson, gang fights and terrorisation, Watts has been left to its own devices: until the media discovers more violence to document. The media attention and consequent negative stereotypes were reasons for photographer Dana Lixenberg (1964) to explore the lives of the individuals living at the Imperial Courts housing project in greater depth. A similar situation continues to develop in Braddock, Pennsylvania, along the banks of the Monongahela River. Braddock was formerly a bustling steel town, but has declined over the past half-century as a result of mill closings, chronic unemployment, toxic waste, redlining and white fight[3]. The process of gentrification of this town has further marginalised its African American residents as the only hospital and largest employer closed to relocate to another suburb. Photographer LaToya Ruby Frazier (1982) said "this continued omission, erasure, invisibility and silence surrounding African-American sacrifices to Braddock and the American grand narrative,"[4] motivated her to explore Braddock's history and present-day reality through the visual narrative of her family. To redress the balance it is necessary to shed light on otherwise hidden aspects of life in these communities which challenge the prevailing stereotypes and archetypes of African Americans. A consciousness of one's own dignity is a fundamental element of this process of changed representation, and it is up to photographers like LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg to produce images which not only counter the negative stereotypical perceptions of African Americans perpetuated by the media but also convey the complexity of black experience and feeling.

The complicated and often frustrating history of African Americans has played a material role in the discourse of black representation. The stereotypes that circulated during times of slavery, in the form of postcard images (fig. 24), were meant to undermine the black's claim to a normal, human life. The first man

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[1] Lixenberg, 2015.

[2] Sastry & Grigsby, 2017.

[3] Berger, 2014.

[4] Berger, 2014.

to counter the notion that all African Americans are the same was social reformer and abolitionist Frederik Douglass. His many portraits (fig. 25, 26) revealed that even blacks came in different forms and were individually complex, and that they were not all poor and should not all be subjugated to slavery or confined to menial jobs. This notion further developed itself during the civil rights movement (1954-1968) when numerous African American photographers like James Van Der Zee (1886-1983) and Charles "Teenie" Harris (1908-1998) chose to document cities densely populated by African Americans, like New York and Chicago. Van Der Zee took to the streets to capture positively vibrant communities which had previously not been depicted in such a way. These communities started to take control of how they were represented in the media and it became common practice for them to maintain an outward appearance which often belied the rough living conditions they endured behind closed doors.

Today, the majority of poorer African American communities inhabit the outskirts of larger cities like Los Angeles and Philadelphia. Here, they seek to create a comfortable environment for themselves and their families. However, given that the history and experience of African American life has frequently been portrayed in the media as being at odds with that of white communities, it is unlikely that they will be left to pursue their lives freely and independently, especially when black men and boys are coupled with criminality and violence, and there is increased public support for a more rigorous approach to policing and punishment.

Contemporary black representations provoke debate because they bring the material world to life. What is more, these photographic images also liberate the viewer's mind by offering previously unknown facts and information. While the media focuses on communities when there is violence to be written about, once the violence subsides, communities like Braddock and Watts are left to their own devices, with little or no attention being paid to the bigger picture of social and economic disparity. The cause of these communities has been taken up by local photographers like Frazier and Western photographers like Lixenberg, with both women taking particular interest in the documentation of life as an African American living in an unforgiving environment. Frazier meshes her work in photography with human rights activism to create visibility for the African American communities[5], while Lixenberg seeks to counter stereotypical images of these communities. This paper will focus on Frazier's *The Notion Of Family* and Lixenberg's *Imperial Courts*. Rather than dwelling on the negativity and violence that has historically been associated with the communities' state of being, the two photographers have chosen to produce images of African Americans which stand as visual resistance to prevailing negative black stereotypes.

The shared aim of both photographic projects is to counter the negative stereotypes that circulate the media today, and is the reason for choosing these projects. Given the shared aim, the photographers might be expected to adopt a similar approach to documenting their subjects. This paper will consider whether the photographers' approach is indeed the same and, on the basis of the observations made, will carry out a further comparison of the methodology used by Frazier and Lixenberg respectively in the field of representation of African Americans. When examining the bodies of work of Frazier and Lixenberg, specific consideration will be given to the photographers' divergent cultural backgrounds, the historical representation of African Americans and the role that the 'observational' and 'participatory modes'[6] play within this discourse

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[5] Frazier, 2016.

[6] According to film critic Bill Nichols the 'participatory' mode means the filmmaker, or in this case the photographer, does interact with his or her subjects rather than unobtrusively observing them, whilst the 'observational' mode tends to simply observe, allowing viewers to reach whatever conclusions they may deduce.

of representation. Chapter one will refer to Deborah Willis' *Reflections in Black* (2000) which sheds light on the photographic portrayal of African Americans throughout history. To attain a better understanding of this subject, further reference will be had to Mark Speltz's *North of Dixie: civil rights photography beyond the south (*2016) and numerous essays written by Maurice Berger. Chapter two will analyse and explain two documentary modes, namely the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes, as introduced by film critic and theoretician Bill Nichols. Although Nichols solely refers to film, the documentary genre of the photographic practice can also be considered in relation to his theories. Chapter three will further explain and apply the above mentioned modes to the projects of Frazier and Lixenberg.

The sources referred to above will be used to establish a basic understanding of African American history through photography and documentary theory which will then be tied to the bodies of work by Lixenberg and Frazier. Information gleaned from literature and essays as well as photographs will be used to analyse the relationship between the photographs produced by each photographer in order to understand the extent to which their divergent cultural backgrounds might influence the manner in which they portray their subjects and answer the question: to what extent do these images have the capacity to inspire new conversations about the photographic representation of African Americans; a field which is a site of ongoing struggle today?

Chapter one: inserting themselves into the conversation

Throughout history, photographs have afforded African Americans a way of "inserting themselves into a conversation," says Rhea Combs curator of Film & Photography National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2015 during an interview with *TIME*. Especially in a society "that oftentimes dismissed them or discounted them"[7] Combs continues. During the 20th century, black-owned photo studios allowed African Americans to represent themselves as they wanted to be seen[8]. By rejecting photographers' portrayals of themselves as racial stereotypes, they were able to control the gaze before the lens. According to the article 'Photos That Challenge Stereotypes About African American Youths' (2016) written by cultural historian and art critic Maurice Berger for *The New York Times*[9], the studio was of particular importance in the case of children, who endured withering attacks on their self-worth as a consequence of stereotypical portrayals. A study in the 1940s by an African American psychologist, Dr. Kenneth Clark, demonstrated the fragility of black children's self-image. When he showed black school students photographs of black and white dolls, identical in every way except for skin colour, the majority chose the white doll as the one they would "like to play with," considering the white doll "nice" and the black doll "bad." Portraits, and the very act of being photographed, therefore played an important role in bolstering the self-confidence of black children in a culture awash with caricatures (fig. 24). During the 19th century, these stereotypes were spread worldwide by means of postcards which depicted racist caricatures of black people, and degrading images of blackness found expression in advertising and other media[10]. Black people were portrayed as lazy, childlike, unintelligent and criminal. Such images seemed to be carefully selected with the purpose of comforting white people in their racist beliefs and justifying the violence and subjugation of black people. Some of these stereotypes still exist and continue to shape perceptions today, and will be examined further in chapter three. The purpose of this chapter is to give an insight into the specific motives of both black and white photographers during the civil rights movement in North America, which came to national prominence during the mid-1950s, and to investigate whether any parallel can be drawn with contemporary visual representations by photographers LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg. To gain full understanding of the importance of the photographic practice, it is necessary to consider the history of African Americans through photography, particularly during the civil rights movement. This will be done by reference to studies conducted by photographic historian Deborah Willis, historian Mark Speltz, sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois and curator of film and photography Rhea Combs. The role of the 'double consciousness' will be taken into account and explained on the basis of Du Bois' essay 'The Souls of Black Folk' (1903). The cultural backgrounds of the chosen photographers will also be considered.

'Double consciousness' is a term coined by sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), referring originally to a source of inward 'twoness' experienced by African Americans due to racial oppression in a white dominated society[11]. As a theoretical tool, 'double consciousness' reveals the psycho-social divisions in American society and provides sufficient understanding of those divisions. Du Bois'

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[7] Berman, 2015.

[8] Berger, 2016.

[9] Berger, 2016.

[10] Willis, 2000.

[11] Douglass, 2009, p72.

focus on the specificity of black experience provides scope for challenging injustice in North America. The term was first used in an Atlantic Monthly article entitled ‘Strivings of the Negro People’ in 1897 and was later republished with minor edits under the title 'Of Our Spiritual Strivings’ in the 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois describes ‘double consciousness’ as a peculiar sensation that gives a sense of looking at yourself through the eyes of another. Du Bois describes it as: “one ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts […] [One] does not wish to Africanise America, […] [One] wouldn’t bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism”[12]. Du Bois continues by stating that the individual simply wishes that it would be possible for man to be both a Negro and an American, without a sense of discrimination. Before the civil rights movement gained momentum, this was a complex desire to fulfil given that African Americans were seldom portrayed as individuals with real lives. Crowded apartment complexes and the ‘ghettos’ were documented from a white perspective which was often in line with the stereotypes that circulated the news. It seems that this notion of double consciousness only became visible when black photographers were included in the larger discourse; namely when they joined the conversation of photography.

An interesting parallel can be drawn with social reformer and abolitionist Frederick Douglass’ favourite trope, ‘chiasmus’, which became a topic of interest around the same time that W.E.B. Du Bois introduced the concept of ‘double consciousness'. ‘Chiasmus' means repeating two or more words, classes or grammatical constructions, balanced against each other in reverse order: “you have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man”[13]. Here, rhetoric is called upon to reverse the world’s order: the order in which the associations between ‘slave’ and ‘black’ and ‘white’ and ‘free’ appears to have been fixed and natural. In his first book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), Douglass affirms various binary oppositions that play a pivotal role: “masters are your fathers; slaves are your mothers. Masters are white and ride in carriages drawn by horses; slaves are black and arrive on foot in the middle of the night”[14]. Later he reverses these associations, stating that they are constructed, misinterpretations of the natural order of things in which all men and women are meant to have equal rights[15]. The apparatus of the camera obscura is the optical counterpart of ‘chiasmus’, literally the mechanism that reproduces, rotates, and reverses a scene, transforming it into a flipped image. Douglass used photography in the same way, registering, through image after image of himself, that the ‘Negro’, ‘the slave’, was as various as any human being could be, not just in comparison to white people but also in themselves. The struggle between being a ‘Negro’ and an American continues today. It is visible in situations which are not confined to the issue of black versus white, and is also present when identifying yourself with the country you live in, were born in or where your parents come from. Frederick Douglass used photography to further his political agenda for antislavery by showing the variation in forms of black subjectivity and displaying individual black specificity. There was not just one Frederick Douglass, there were many (fig. 25, 26), which was his claim to being fully and equally human. Douglass was acutely aware that images matter. As the most photographed African American man during the 19th century, and by using the

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[12] Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2016.

[13] Douglass, 2009, p72.

[14] Douglass, 2009, p72.

[15] Gates, 2016, p28.

160 photographic portraits of himself, he attempted both to display and displace, and to show the contours of the anti-slave who is the same as every white human being. His intention was to use these visual images to erase the extensive racist stereotypes that had accumulated in order to erase the African American stereotypes; stereotypes that were meant to undermine the 'Negro's' claim of a common humanity, and therefore the rights to freedom and citizenship and economic opportunity[16]. Douglass used Daguerre's camera obscura to fabricate the very images by which the 'Negro' as anti-slave could emerge and then progress, "clothed in his own form"[17]. If racist images could be crushed, they could be countered, and countered with force.

The next pivotal moment for African Americans in general, and photographers in particular, was the civil rights movement that started in the 1950s. Through non-violent protests, the civil rights movement helped break the pattern of public facilities being segregated by race, particularly in the South, and facilitated the most important breakthrough in the equal-rights legislation for African Americans[18]. This movement was of central importance because it became apparent how agency could be created in the space between lens and subject: "there is a real, conscientious effort with individuals that are standing in front of the camera to present themselves in a way that shows a regality, a fortitude, a resolve," says Combs. As previously mentioned, this notion stemmed from Frederick Douglass, who insisted on seeing the photographs before they were distributed, understanding the importance of controlling his image since, during the mid-nineteenth century, abolitionists mailed out photographs of slaves in an effort to change minds on the topic of slavery[19]. Photography became a matter of trust and control, an aspect that will be discussed further in this chapter. During the civil rights movement in the 1950s, many images were taken by photographers who were not African American. An example of a white photographer who gained the trust of black Chicagoans by means of conversation rather than an anthropological study, was Wayne Miller (1918-2013). While such instances were rare, they did nevertheless help create agency that was required at that time. This was achieved by giving the subject control during the photographic process; allowing them, just as Frederick Douglass had done, to take the reins, a state which contrasted with the African American press, mainstream newspapers and magazines which did not, as a general rule, cover issues of racism, segregation and black activism. It must be said, however, that if these stories did become newsworthy, they would be portrayed through a Southern lens[20], relying on sensationalist images of violence and murder to arouse the interest of readers[21]. Historian Mark Speltz wrote, "historical photographs of northern struggles remain less familiar today for a variety of reasons, but primarily because the uncomfortable truths they contain complicate a celebratory civil rights narrative"[22]. Here it is interesting to note that the complete account of the northern struggles were negated, resulting in a history of the civil rights movements that solely focuses on the struggles of southern

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[16] Gates, 2016, p29.

[17] Gates, 2016, p29.

[18] Clayborne, 2017.

[19] Berman, 2015.

[20] According to historian Mark Speltz, as stated in his book *North of Dixie: Civil Rights Photography Beyond the South*, "Historical photographs of northern struggles remain less familiar today for a variety of reasons, but primarily because the uncomfortable truths they contain complicate a celebratory civil rights narrative." It is interesting to note that the Northern struggles were ignored, even though they were the same as the struggles in the South.

[21] Berger, 2016.

[22] Speltz, 2016, p17.

part of North America. However unpalatable, images were used out of context and spread through various media channels, consequently presenting a skewed view of the southern struggles. Such photographs find a striking antecedent in Walter Benjamin's essay "The Author as Producer" (1934), which reflects on the paradox between the production of a work of art and its political orientation, and states that the creation of a disinterested, autonomous or non-political art piece is impossible[23]. Benjamin's key argument was that mass culture seemed to nullify the degree of impact the dissemination of materials, like photographs, had on those who were documented. Through photography, Benjamin wrote, images of poverty and "the struggle against misery"[24] could become aestheticised, even pleasurable. These types of images (fig. 14, 18) affirm the importance of photography in the lives of millions of African Americans, for whom it was a way to represent themselves as they wanted to be seen, in contrast to the negative stereotypes they were often confronted with[25]. It seems that images of violence against African Americans circulate less as evidence or documentation but, to a greater extent, as a re-inscription of whiteness that is underwritten by the power to look at pain from a distance[26]. It is in this context that photography, as current events confirm, has become increasingly important for African American communities, both as a means of documenting problems, and as a catalyst for hope and change. It gave African Americans the chance to insert themselves into the conversation, offering a way to gain control over how they were depicted by outsiders or by-standers. The importance of hope in relation to people who are marginalised as a result of social circumstances has been examined in the research literature and, according to Miller & Powers, can be defined as: "a state of being characterised by an anticipation for a continued good state, an improved state, or a release from a perceived entrapment. […] Hope is an anticipation of a future which is good, based on mutuality, a sense of personal competence, coping ability, psychological well-being, purpose and meaning in life and a sense of the possible"[27], meaning hope could instigate change.

A second important element in the photographic portrayal of African Americans is its combination with language or text. Author Mary Price has written how the language of description is deeply implicated in the act of looking at photographs[28] and the dependence of photographs upon the words used to describe them is apparent. Captions, for example, can be used to place an image in the wrong context. One such example is a photograph taken in 1936 by Jack Manning (1921-2001) of tenants gathered on fire escapes (fig. 19). Originally this image was accompanied by a caption which summed up their plight: "an Elks parade brought these hundreds of [African Americans] from their packed apartments to dramatise the worst housing problem in New York." Seventy-five years later the image was reinterpreted and, in hindsight, appears euphoric rather than dispiriting. In fact, the photograph documents an event which celebrated pride and citizenship, and this was used as the new caption. The group gathered on the fire escape was an independent African American organisation that had been formed when blacks were repeatedly denied participation in white fraternal organisations. During the 1940s the text and photographs produced by the *Harlem Document Group* - which

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[23] Benjamin, 2005/1934, p62.

[24] Benjamin, 2005/1934, p62.

[25] Berger, 2016.

[26] For further reading: Susan Sontag's Regarding The Pain of Others.

[27] Miller, 1988, p6.

[28] Price, 1994, p1.

was part of New York's Photo League - focused primarily on the negative and despairing, largely ignoring the optimism and cultural richness of a community that thrived despite adversity[29], this exemplifies Price's statement regarding the impact that textual language has on the reading of a photograph. Since most urban blacks were separated and sequestered from white neighbourhoods, their lives and daily experiences remained hidden from the American majority during the postwar years and beyond. As writer Thulani Davis reflected, "White America [during the post war years] did not know that we lived in a complete universe. In our private lives we were whole. We enjoyed a richness that the mainstream almost never showed"[30]. The inequities and racial discrimination that African Americans encountered in the North of Dixie[31] were also hidden from the everyday lives of white Americans. This reinterpretation affirms that photographs — instantaneous representations of a specific time and place — are not absolute truths. A picture can tell diverse, even contradictory, stories, mitigated first by the photographer's point of view and later by how it is contextualised and interpreted[32]. Southern States frequently ran photographs in American newspapers and magazines which documented the struggles during the civil rights movement from 1955 through to the 1960s. These images of repression and violence stirred the nation's conscience and garnered sympathy for the movement[33]. Historian Nicholas Natanson considers the work by white photographer Robert McNeill, who made a documentary record of African American life during the 1930s and 1940s. Natanson cautions the reader to avoid placing McNeill's work in the usual categories that were attributed to photographs of black subjects during this period and states that the various documentations of African Americans during this period tended to fall into distinct genres. Categories like the 'Colourful Black' frequented the white-edited mass media, whilst the polar opposites 'Noble Primitive' and 'Black Victim' were also not uncommon. In the black press, however, there also appeared the 'Role Model'; "the polished professional whose visual authority was designed to counter the effect of many of the aforementioned representational modes"[34]. According to Natanson, McNeill's documentation of African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s embodied the Role Model category as his work was most often published in black papers. His photography considered the interests of his subjects as well as his own personal ones and he ensured that the captions which accompanied the press photographs were his own words[35].

Although a number of African Americans practised photography, very few were credited in major exhibitions or books and magazines. The controversial exhibition *Harlem on My Mind* (1969) at The Metropolitan Museum of Art was the first opportunity to see black photographers' work in a major museum exhibition. It was a production that received much criticism because it was supposed to represent the culturally rich and historically black community of Harlem, but public frustration with the museum's selection of objects and

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[29] Berger, 2015.

[30] Speltz, 2016, p5.

[31] Dixie is a historical nickname for the Southern United States, North of Dixie is therefore anywhere outside of South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee, Missouri and Kentucky.

[32] Berger, 2015.

[33] Kasher, 1996.

[34] Willis, 2000, p89.

[35] Willis, 2000, p88.

depiction of cross-cultural relationships led to boycotts of the exhibition before it even opened[36]. Shortly after, the accompanying catalogue was even pulled from shop shelves. The exhibition's problems were far ranging, but most troubling was the sense of exclusion. The museum chose, for example, to organise the exhibition without the participation of the black people living in the neighbourhood. In this regard, the very culture that excludes people of colour, perpetuates racism and underwrites white privilege can also alter racial perceptions by demonstrating the value of white self-enquiry. Yet such questioning remains extremely rare. Indeed, in American culture, the vast majority of important work about race is created by artists of colour[37]. *Look* profiled Grady Starks, who explained that freedom in the North meant cramming into "the Box, Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto, with 350,000 other black folk"[38]. Starks's perspective on 'the Box' as a densely populated and cramped neighbourhood was illustrated with a photograph of front stoops running along an uneven and crowded sidewalk[39]. Influential black-owned newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *California Eagle* and the *Philadelphia Tribune* fed their citizens with news of positive representations, while African American photographers captured evidence of the flourishing black urban life and culture that continues to influence America today[40].

Apart from this production, fewer than ten photography books appeared by or about black photographers[41] prior to 1970[42]. To follow was the first wave of exhibitions and books of work by emerging black photographers, a period in which approximately twenty-eight titles by or about black photographers were published. In the midst of the civil rights and Black Arts movements, photography was considered the perfect medium for self-representation, poised to capture those defining historical moments. As these photographers initiated a new means of photographic expression, a handful of titles preserved a record of survey exhibitions and introduced the work of more black photographers to a wider audience. Between 1973 and 1980, the mission of the new volume *The Black Photographers Annual* was to define "a new blackness, real and strong as our history, pushing consciousness toward a new place - an understanding, a belief, the awareness of self […] all new, perhaps, but ancient in concept"[43]. The first issue was arranged in two sections: the first, a selection of fifty-five images by a variety of photographers (fig. 28), and the second, individual mini portfolios by a selection of photographers practising at that time (fig. 29). The community dynamic of such a journal functioned as a support mechanism for black photographers. It is also notable that female photographers were included in every volume. Having considered the notions of trust and context at the beginning of this chapter, it is salient to note that this journal did not provide any editorial context to the images. They were presented as just that: images. This was an editorial choice which reflected the desire not

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36 Cooks, 2016, p23.

37 Berger, 2016.

38 Speltz, 2016, p7.

39 Speltz, 2016, p19.

40 Speltz, 2016, p5.

41 Gordon Parks was amongst the ten photographers who did publish such a book.

42 Cooks, 2016, p23.

43 Williams, 2016, p31.

only to identify these makers as photographic artists but also avoid any misconceptions regarding the situations depicted in the images themselves, as in the case of Jack Manning or Robert McNeill. These volumes created visibility and opportunities for the photographers whose work was included in them as well as the black photographers to come. The 1980s and 1990s saw the greatest period of publication to date for books by black photographers. It encouraged scholars to research and construct a history that had not previously been documented.

Let us consider W.E.B Du Bois' theory of 'double consciousness' once again and place it in a contemporary context. The exhibition in Washington called *Double Exposure* (2015) at the National Museum Of African American History And Culture alludes to W. E. B. Du Bois' historic notion: the extent to which African Americans, caught between the promise of freedom and equality and the reality of racism and segregation, struggled with a multifaceted conception of themselves. As Du Bois observed, black people inevitably felt a sense of "twoness — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder"[44]. The exhibition, in combination with the book, gives new insight into many images; especially the text and photographs taken by members of the *Harlem Document Group* which, as previously mentioned, placed most emphasis on the despairing. What is more, African Americans recognised that they had to use technology to fight the struggle for freedom and fairness. Sometimes this occurred in a sophisticated way, as with Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois, and, at other times, intuitively. It can be seen that photography became the tool to showcase images of strength as early as the 19th century. The ongoing and constantly evolving struggle against police brutality and militarism, entrenched poverty, institutionalised racism and everyday micro-aggressions suggests that photographs will continue to play a crucial role in documenting the struggle and advancing the much needed dialogue around it[45]. As psychologist Hagedorn argues, photographs also provide an opportunity to capture experiences that can generally not be described purely by language[46]. In this way, photography becomes an instrument that encourages the understanding of various human experiences, including discrimination.

Yet can the cultural background of the photographer be said to influence the nature of their documentary approach? We have seen it happen during the civil rights movement, so is it still possible today? When considering the modes of observation and participation, could the projects of photographers LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg inspire new conversations about the continuing struggle for black freedom, more than a half century after the passage of the landmark civil rights legislation that was intended to address and perhaps alleviate the nation's racial issues? The photographs presented by Frazier and Lixenberg inform us about various African American stories which for a long time remained unseen by the public eye. They serve as a narrative about the diverse group of people who fought for their beliefs and for social change for their communities. They relate to stories which are silenced once the acts of violence settle

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[44] Du Bois, 1903, p2-3.

[45] Speltz, 2016, p141.

[46] Hagedorn, 1996, p517-527.

themselves and peoples' lives return to 'normal'. Although the nature of *The Notion of Family* and *Imperial Courts* are inherently different (one is a personal account of Frazier's hometown struggling after the demolition of the town's only hospital, whilst the other is a documentation of a large-scale housing project on the outskirts of LA from a seemingly outsiders perspective), both are personal and political in intent. To what extent, then, do these images have the capacity to inspire new conversations about the struggle for black freedom which continues to the present day?

Chapter two: finding its social function

Documentary images and films are expected to be taken straight from daily life or, according to film critic and theoretician Bill Nichols, at least their "sounds and images [should] bear an indexical relation to the historical world"[47]. This is a crucial sensibility because the social connotations of documentary issues are pivotal, particularly when considering truth and objectivity in photography, in relation to critical authorship. This chapter investigates the capacity of the medium to articulate current and radically democratic political ambitions, with a particular focus on the various modes of documentary introduced by Nichols. Although Nichols' theories put emphasis on documentary film, this essay will apply the same theories to photography in the belief that the role of the maker is comparable within photography and film[48]. Furthermore, theoretical arguments concerning photography's role in today's politics of representation and the impact of the politics of presenting photographs in their functional potential as a tool for social change will be addressed. The effect of staging and posing in the context of documentary photography will also be examined. These topics will be discussed with specific reference to the works of photographers Dana Lixenberg and LaToya Ruby Frazier in order to gain a better understanding of the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes of documentary, and the extent to which the use of either or both these modes might reflect the relationship between the photographer and his subjects.

In the 1970s the urge for young visual artists to integrate photography into their practice was made more compelling by the sudden increase of social critique in part of the conceptual art world. During this period, these artists built on earlier experiments to introduce photography as an artistic medium. Not only did photography help establish a new art form, it continued to develop as an essential medium for critical commentary on various societal issues and was increasingly used as a method of documentation. This method of photography includes aspects of journalism, art, education, politics, sociology, and history. Previously, documentary photography was considered primarily to "[have] a goal beyond the production of a fine print", however some documentary photographers' intention was in fact social investigation, the aim being to "pave the way for social change"[49]. According to American artist Martha Rosler, it seems that since the late 1930s aspects of the photographic practice have engaged with "structural injustices, often to provoke active responses"[50]. Once the documentary practice entered the museum space and was consecrated as a modernist art during the 1960s, it lost much of its original social function outside the museum and gallery context. The younger generation at that time understood this institutional consecration of the documentary mode as a reification of photography's potential for social critique since it offered them the opportunity to reintroduce the function of the photographic image as a visual art accompanied by theoretical or political statements. Critic and theorist Allan Sekula identified the function of documentary photography as an act of resistance in his essay 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary. Notes on the Politics of Representation' (1976-1978), stating that it is "a resistance aimed ultimately at socialist transformation"[51], building on the notion that photographers aspire to create an aesthetic that they believe should somehow

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47 Nichols, 1991, p27.

48 Documentary film and photography should both bear an indexical relation to the historical world.

49 Wells, 2008 [1996], p69.

50 Rosler, 2005 [1999/2001], p221.

51 Sekula, 1999 [1984], p138.

have the potential to intervene in the political process for the purpose of social change. Artist and writer Victor Burgin clarified this notion further, explaining that, for Walter Benjamin, the concept of "pan-discursivity" meant a "devolution of established subject positions"[52]. On a most basic level, as Benjamin states in his landmark essay 'The Author as Producer' (1934), this implies that photographers should aspire to give their pictures "a caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and give it a revolutionary use value"[53]. Finding out how and when photographs in art can be used to create a visual imagery that presents itself as critical is a delicate exercise. Text can be seen to play an important role in this process since it often prevents images from being uploaded with content that, in terms of the worldview conveyed, is unclear[54]. The documentary image's potential to function as a reflective actor of social agency depends not only on the context in which such photographs appear[55] but also the role of the photographer. In other words, does he choose to remain an outsider or to interact with the subject?

Classical documentary text books[56], which focused primarily on film (as opposed to photography), seem to take a different approach when defining documentary. They do not appear to consider it from the viewer's point of view, but from the perspective of the documentary. In *Claiming The Real,* Brian Winston underlines the fact that the presentation of factual material is mediated by a subject (the filmmaker or photographer) and by a medium (film, video, photograph, new media), and that this mediation is not neutral[57]. Similarly, documentary theorist Stella Bruzzi has placed particular emphasis on the role of the filmmaker or photographer, stating that documentaries are "performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming"[58]. In her opinion, the documentary is "a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other"[59]. The aim of documentary filmmakers (and photographers) has therefore evolved from representing reality, to ordering reality and, finally to becoming a negotiation with reality[60]. Yet what is meant by the term negotiation? Bruzzi sees the filmmaker or photographer as invading a space and influencing it - leaving behind the illusion of an objective film or photograph. The disruption of reality by the performance of a filmmaker or photographer is what makes the meaning and the value of the documentary. She views the documentary as a "dialectical conjunction of a real space and the filmmakers or, in this case, the photographers that invade it"[61]. Bruzzi stresses that "although an image can document, it has no meaning without the context that is the film"[62]. The French documentarist and theorist Jean-Louis Comolli returns to the relationship between the human eye and its mechanical counterpart, but reaches very different conclusions, believing that through the advent of photography "the human eye loses its immemorial privilege; the mechanical eye of the photographic machine now sees in its

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[52] Westgeest & van Gelder, 2011, p216.

[53] Benjamin, 2005/1994, p87.

[54] Westgeest & van Gelder, 2011, p162.

[55] Westgeest & van Gelder, 2011, p164.

[56] Written by, for example Allan Sekula and Alan Trachtenberg

[57] Winston, 1995.

[58] Bruzzi, 2000, p4.

[59] Bruzzi, 2000, p4.

[60] This evolution does not have to be seen as strictly chronological, but as movements and tendencies that can co-exist in the same documentary.

[61] Bruzzi, 2000, p125.

[62] Bruzzi, 2009, p9.

place, and in certain aspects with more sureness. The photograph stands as at once the triumph and the grave of the eye"[63]. For the image to acquire sense, it needs to be part of a structure, a logic, an access point to reality that is the documentary itself. This gives the filmmaker or photographer, as a performer while filming or photographing and a decision maker while editing, sole responsibility for the creation of meaning.

In his book *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols defines documentary from three points of view: the filmmaker, the text and the viewer. He is aware that each view "leads to a different yet not contradictory definition"[64]. Nichols' acknowledgment that the viewer's expectations are as important as the filmmaker's agenda in defining documentary and that technology has an active role in shaping a film could be deemed to be the essence of his contribution to the subject matter, since he considers an artefact from different points of view in order to define it. He does not focus solely on the potential players in documentary, but also considers six different modes of documentary which he uses as a "basic way of organising texts in relation to certain recurrent features or conventions"[65]. A mode conveys a perspective on reality, because the logical structure that a documentary follows says a lot about where the filmmaker or photographer, and their audience, positions himself while mediating reality. Within the modes, the emphasis lies on how meaning is created rather than the meaning sought to be conveyed, and it may be difficult to understand what the relationship is between the physical world and the world negotiated by the media. Nichols' claim that documentary cannot be seen as a reproduction of reality, but as a representation of the world we occupy[66] thus becomes useful. He proposes that documentary frames and organises reality into a text[67] and posits six modes[68] of documentary, namely the 'poetic', 'expository', 'observational', 'participatory', 'reflexive' and 'performative' modes. Given the natural development of the documentary tradition in photography, Nichols' theories on documentary film can be seen to be equally applicable to photography. This chapter will therefore focus on the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes in relation to the photographic projects of Dana Lixenberg and LaToya Ruby Frazier, and their positions as makers. By focusing on these two modes, a thorough comparison can be made of the two projects in terms of the theories established by Nichols about the 'participatory' and 'observational' modes. This comparison will reveal the position of the photographers in relation to their respective cultural backgrounds and subjects. The two modes are very different in intent, much like *The Notion Of Family* and *Imperial Courts,* however there may be parallels to be drawn that will bring the projects closer together. The approach adopted by the photographer plays a vital role in the portrayal of the subject matter and also affects the viewer's perception of the work. For this reason, much emphasis will be placed on the analysis of the photographer's position in relation to their subject(s).

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[63] Comolli, 1980, p122–3.

[64] Nichols, 1991, p12.

[65] Nichols, 1991, p32.

[66] Nichols, 2001, p20.

[67] Nichols, 1991, p8.

[68] The 'poetic mode' reassembles fragments of the world and transforms historical material into a more abstract, lyrical form, usually associated with 1920s and modernist ideas; the 'expository mode' reassembles social issues into an argumentative frame, mediated by a voice-of-God narration; the 'observatory mode' introduces a mobile camera and avoids the moralising tone of the expository documentary as technology advanced by the 1960s and camera became smaller and lighter, able to document life in a less intrusive manner; the 'participatory mode' records the encounter between the filmmaker and subject; the 'reflexive mode' demonstrates consciousness of the process of reading documentary, and engages actively with the issues of realism and representation, acknowledging the presence of the viewer; the 'performative mode' acknowledges the emotional and subjective aspects of documentary, and presents ideas as part of a context, having different meanings for different people, often autobiographical in nature.

Given that documentary is frequently perceived as realist, the assumption of the viewer is that things have happened in front of the camera as they would have happened if the camera had not been there. The expectation of the viewer is important, regardless of whether his assumption is true. At the core of Nichols' vision is the belief that "the word documentary must itself be constructed in much the same manner as the world we know and see. The practice of documentary film or photography is the site of contestation and change"[69]. On one hand Nichols does not coin a single definition, choosing instead three points of view referred to above (the filmmaker, the text and the viewer), on the other hand he regards those points of view as constituting an overall logic that creates the documentary mode of representing reality. In the case of the 'observational' mode, it appears that filmmakers and photographers prefer to abandon all forms of control as regards the staging, arrangement, or composition of a scene or image. In its place they employ spontaneous observation, meaning that they do not make use of historical reenactments or repeated behaviour for the camera. Consequently, the resulting images resembles that of the Italian neorealist filmmakers, allowing the viewer, and the documentarian, to look in on life 'as it is', and causing the social actors to engage with each other and ignore the camera. By contrast, the 'participatory' mode makes it possible for the documentarian to interact with his subjects rather than unobtrusively observe them.

As explained above, there is a distinct difference between the 'participatory' and 'observational' modes; "being there [on site] calls for participation, being here allows for observation"[70]. Anthropology, for example, remains heavily defined by the practice of field work where an anthropologist lives among a people for an extended period of time, learns the language and customs, and then writes up what he has learnt. Much like the anthropological practice, the 'participatory' mode, according to Bill Nichols, involves interaction between the filmmaker or photographer and his subject, rather than unobtrusively observing them[71]. The involvement on the part of the filmmaker or photographer develops into a pattern of collaboration or confrontation, and this mode of documentary has even come to embrace the viewer as a participant as well. What happens in front of the camera becomes an index of the nature of the interaction between filmmaker and subject[72], meaning that the 'participatory' mode inflicts this 'I speak about them to you' formulation into something that is often closer to 'I speak with them for us (you and I)'. The filmmaker or photographer's interactions thus give us a distinctive window into a particular portion of the world. 'Participatory' documentary gives us a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker or photographer to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result. Since emphasis is placed on the experience of the filmmaker or photographer as well as the situation itself, this form of documentation can be said to draw on diary, confession or essayistic traditions. These characteristics are unmistakably present in the work of LaToya Ruby Frazier first and foremost because the subject matter of her work is her hometown and her familial situation, in particular, her relationship with her mother. The study of her hometown and her family is meant to give insight into the reality of a town like Braddock, which has been affected by societal and political struggles that manifest themselves in signs of neglect and urban decay. Unlike her contemporaries Lee Friedlander or W. Eugene Smith, Frazier tells the tale from an insider's perspective. *The Notion Of Family*

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[69] Nichols, 1991, p12.

[70] Nichols, 2001, p181.

[71] Nichols, 2001, p179.

[72] Nichols, 2001, p179.

consists of a mix of self-portraits of Frazier, sometimes together with her mother, and close-ups of family members in their surroundings, specifically the interior of their homes in combination with the landscape in which they live and work. When regarding the image of Frazier whilst her mother straightens her hair (fig. 1), the viewer is welcomed into the intimate space of the bedroom where he is able to watch the beauty rituals that take place before these women leave the house. The personal nature of these photographs make this project diaristic and essayistic in intent, and this type of documentation[73] benefits from the impact that the photographer's presence has on the overall story that is told. When viewers see images that are made from this perspective, they "expect to witness the historical world as represented by someone who actively engages with others, rather than unobtrusively observing, poetically reconfiguring, or argumentatively assembling what others say and do"[74]. Engaging with viewers at an intimate level encourages "sympathetic experience and action" of a diverse audience[75], and can be seen in the image titled *Mom and Mr Yerbys, Hands* (fig. 6). Because it is a detailed shot, Frazier has managed to invade the personal space of both her subjects. The close-up of the hands placed between Mr Yerbys' legs reveals her close proximity to the two individuals and that they probably knew she was taking this picture. Furthermore, hands, just like the face, can reveal a lot about a person. Not only the skin but the nails and rings can tell how someone has lived**.** When we consider the work of Dana Lixenberg[76] in relation to the 'participatory' mode, the lived encounter with her subject is clear and retraceable otherwise she would not have been able to take the photographs. While she was born and grew up in the Netherlands, it is also known that she spent time living in the United States, and got to know members of the Imperial Courts community before commencing her project. Trust has therefore been established. Notwithstanding this, one particular characteristic of the 'participatory' mode seems to be lacking, namely the notion of engagement, with an exchange of glances between photographer and subject frequently absent from her images. According to critic George Pitts of *Hotshoe Magazine*, the range of pictures are "moving yet shrewdly quiet [and] afforded her subjects the pleasure of being themselves as compelling individuals […] despite their monolithic, emotionally reserved surfaces, her casts of subjects surge throughout this dazzling series with a collective cool and an unfussy sense of elegance that imbues these men, women and children with quiet fire and vivid sense of style and self"[77]. Lixenberg says herself that she connected with her subjects on a personal level, and that they confided in her, however, this engagement is not directly visible in her photographs. This means, for example, that in a museum or gallery space, the use of additional notes would be important as a means of establishing context and enabling the viewer to understand the level of experience and feeling that underlies this project. We see how 'participatory documentary' can stress the actual, lived encounter between filmmaker and subject, as in fig. 1, fig. 4 and fig. 7. Frazier is physically present in fig. 1, while in fig. 4 she invades the space of her subjects to the point that she cannot hide taking a photograph.

In the case of the 'participatory' mode, the presence of the photographer takes on heightened

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[73] The diary or essayistic documentary style reflects and can be derived from the work of photographers Nan Goldin and Ed van der Elsken. However, the work of Goldin mainly focusses on a caucasian group of people, and she herself is also a white American, meaning that the photographic approach may differ.

[74] Nichols, 2001, p182.

[75] Starrett, 2003, p398-428.

[76] Fig. 8, fig. 9, fig. 10, fig. 11, fig. 12, fig. 13

[77] Pitts, 2013

importance, from the physical act of getting the shot to the political act of joining forces with one's subjects, and can result in a highly personal and poignant quality. Returning to LaToya Ruby Frazier's work, a salient point is whether the 'participatory documentary' mode might not become too personal, causing the viewer to retreat from the intimacy of the images he regards. In that case it might be argued that the personal aspect affects the directness of the story that is told, rendering the images less sympathetic to a diverse audience. Might the 'observational' mode then be preferable?

The 'observational' mode poses a series of ethical considerations which involve the act of observing others going about their affairs. It is a mode which raises two key questions. Firstly, is such an act in and of itself voyeuristic[78] and secondly, does it place the viewer in a necessarily less comfortable position than in a fiction film? According to Nichols, "in fiction scenes are specifically contrived for us to oversee and overhear, whereas documentary scenes represent the lived experience of actual people that we happen to witness"[79]. The same could be said about photography when looking at a body of work that has been created in much the same way as surveillance tapes. A viewer in this position might feel uncomfortable if pleasure in looking seems to take priority over the chance to acknowledge and interact with the one being watched. The viewer is overseeing a situation from a distance without actually interacting with the subjects who are being documented, and the effect might be to discourage the sympathetic experience and action of a diverse audience. Consider Lixenberg's photograph *Trayvon, Nunu, China & June* (fig. 12), in which a group of residents of the Imperial Courts housing project casually sit together. A sense of irritation seems to wash over many of their faces, as if Lixenberg is not welcome to take this photograph. As mentioned previously, Lixenberg interacted with her subjects and even built up strong relationships with them yet no empathy is evident in this image. By adopting the 'observational' mode and appearing impassive to the feelings of her subjects, Lixenberg can be seen to document her subjects differently from Frazier.

While Frazier's images generally reveal interaction between photographer and subject, there are nevertheless certain portraits in *The Notion of Family* which demonstrate the same dispassionateness as those of Lixenberg. Consider *Me and Mom's Boyfriend Mr. Art* (fig. 5). The viewer might automatically assume that Frazier's mother is standing by the doorpost in between the two bedrooms, spying on her daughter and her boyfriend. Both subjects are seemingly unaware of the presence of the camera, creating a disconnect between photographer and subject. This disregard for the camera and the relinquishment of control as regards the arrangement of a pose or scene are key to differentiating between the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes. It can be seen that the modes are not always exclusively 'observational' or 'participatory' and that characteristic elements of one mode or the other are interchangeable. Extra information provided to the viewer in the form of text or film reveals that the intention of the photographer is not voyeuristic[80] and that she is simply observing family members within her own household. In Lixenberg's portrait (fig. 12) the viewer would likely understand that Lixenberg is not a member of this community. While additional information, once again in the form of text or film, would reveal to the viewer that she has

[78] Reference is not made to Freud's version of scopophilia or voyeurism, instead in this context voyeurism is considered a way of witnessing someone else's everyday life from a close distance.

[79] Nichols, 2001, p133.

[80] The distance between photographer and subject does not seem big enough for it to feel voyeuristic, it would almost be impossible for the subjects not to notice the photographer standing in the hallway.

established a relationship of trust with the members of this community and has engaged with them, no sense of cooperation or empathy is detectable in the photographs themselves. A distance remains between the photographer and her subjects throughout Lixenberg's project, causing us to question whether it is possible for an outsider to create images in the 'participatory documentary' mode that will resound sufficiently with a diverse audience to achieve her stated goal. However, Lixenberg's subjects do make constant eye contact with the camera lens meaning that there is interaction between photographer and subject.

The work of Lixenberg and Frazier embodies elements of what Michael Fried referred to as 'absorption'[81] versus 'theatricality'[82]. Lixenberg's work exemplifies Fried's 'theatricality' in the sense that the figures represented in the images stare straight into the camera, they make eye contact with the photographer, and viewer, as if they are on stage. The link between Lixenberg's work and Fried's 'theatricality' further emphasises the somewhat distant stance the photographer takes in documenting her subjects. It is unknown whether this is a conscious choice, but it certainly increases the distance that is present between subject and photographer as well as subject and viewer. Frazier's work does the opposite. Although the women in *Momme* (fig. 7) make eye contact with the photographer, and viewer, much of *The Notion Of Family* evidences this notion of 'absorption', whereby the figures in the images do not make eye contact with the photographer or the viewer, but focus intently on an object in the photograph. This allows the viewer to examine the photograph with prolonged concentration, creating, in turn, a feeling of involvement. These notions, whether deliberate or not, affect how the viewer experiences the photographs.

Last but not least, an ethical question arises: if it is accepted that the documentary has abandoned its pretensions to objectivity, and has increasingly turned to the local and the specific[83], how can filmmakers and photographers simply observe and share the stories if they have not interacted with the subjects or situation? The act of entering the area to observe and potentially exploit then seems less praiseworthy than acknowledging the existence of a problematic issue and attempting to resolve it in the moment. While Lixenberg mentions that she hopes to assist the inhabitants of Imperial Courts by countering prevailing negative stereotypes, the majority of images which comprise this body of work lack sensitivity and may fail to encourage attentiveness or sympathy in the viewer, which may link to Fried's notion of 'theatricality' is discussed above. Although the images are powerful, fierce and impressive, they fail to convey the sense of community that exists there. The internal struggle between the 'crips and bloods' is ongoing however with the exception of the frequent fights, there is a sense of happiness, humanity and affection that is not apparent in Lixenberg's photographs. The situation in which the residents find themselves is complicated, and rough, but by seemingly neglecting the intimate elements of the insider's perspective it can be argued that Lixenberg's work documents a perspective which, albeit different from that of the media, nevertheless remains that of an outsider. It is therefore necessary to consider whether the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes can exist independently or if successful representation depends on a combination of elements from the two modes.

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[81] 'Absorption' refers to figures that intentionally ignore the viewer, instead they focus intently on an object in the painting, or in this case the photograph. The artwork seems deliberately unaware of the beholder, which in turn creates a perfect trance of involvement for the viewer. The viewer is drawn in to examine the artwork with prolonged concentration.

[82] 'Theatricality' is opposed to 'absorption'. It gives the semblance that the figures are on stage, this creates a distance between the artwork and viewer.

[83] Renov, 1993, p12-36.

In conclusion it can be seen that LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg have adopted elements of both the 'participatory' and 'observational' modes, although Frazier's work can be characterised as representing the 'participatory' mode while that of Lixenberg is predominantly 'observational'[84]. While the two women share the same goal of producing representations of African Americans to counter prevailing media stereotypes, with Frazier adding a layer of human rights activism to create visibility for these communities, as discussed at length in chapter one, it can nevertheless be concluded that the documentarian's interactions give us a distinctive window into a particular portion of our world, which comprises a multiplicity of communities. We understand that photographs provide "evidence not only of what's there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world"[85]**.** In other words, different people take different pictures even when photographing the same thing. It is clear that there is much more to life in Braddock and Watts than gang violence and criminality however it must be understood that countering negative stereotypes cannot be seen simply in terms of black representation as a single positive image and that the field or representation (how African Americans see themselves and how others see them) is, indeed, a site of ongoing struggle. Frazier's intimate images reveal details that speak specifically and directly to a black audience (the long nails, the multitude of rings) and may not be understood by other viewers, while Lixenberg's powerful but dispassionate photographs may not communicate the subtle relationships and emotions imparted by activities, interactions and environments in Watts to a diverse audience. While, individually, the projects may not convey the full complexity of experience and feeling of African Americans, they nevertheless fulfil a social function by changing, albeit momentarily, the way viewers perceive and relate to members of communities like Braddock and Watts. The 'participatory' and 'observational' modes of documentation can thus be said to contribute to the notion of 'layering in' multiple potential experiences for different viewers and of using emotional experience to increase engagement with as wide an audience as possible. It seems that the poses of the subjects play a distinct role in the viewer's perception of the photographs. Allowing the viewer to observe and build a relationship with the images may develop an aspect of sensibility that is present in Frazier's work, whilst the obtrusive stares in Lixenberg's work create a sense of distance because the viewer does not experience the same freedom or space to observe. In the case of Frazier and Lixenberg, one photographer is part of the community (Frazier) and one is an outsider (Lixenberg), it becomes interesting to consider whether the diverse positions of the photographers in their respective communities influence their approach and what effect, if any, this has on bringing about the potentially desired societal or political change by means of their photographic projects**.**

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[84] The distinction between the 'participatory' and 'observational' modes are not black and white. The intention of the photographer may embody more characteristics of one mode, however, elements of another mode are bound to be incorporated. This is also the case for Frazier and Lixenberg.

[85] Sontag, 1977, p88.

Chapter three: through the photographer's eyes

As explained in the previous chapters, photography is a suitable medium in which to retrace the (visual) history of African Americans. It is a tool which lends itself to decoding situations that are bound by fear and desire: the contradictory emotions which, according to psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, "lie at the heart of the psychic reality of racism"[86]. In contemporary America it is not uncommon for photographers to reflect subconsciously upon historical images of African Americans, not necessarily through appropriation, but in an indirect attempt to add to the historical discourse about African Americans. LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg are examples of such photographers. Women like Frazier and Lixenberg turn the camera either on themselves or other African Americans to represent not only how African Americans see themselves but also to counter how they are 'normally' seen by society.

Times have changed and in the post-civil rights movement in North America it could be argued that the contemporary gaze upon African Americans operates differently than it did in the past. There is no longer a paucity of black images and while some continue to shed negative light, many counter the stereotypical perception of African Americans by revealing previously hidden aspects of their lives. Yet as feminist and activist Bell Hooks has written, "the countering of negative stereotypes cannot be seen only in terms of 'the simple reduction of black representation to a 'positive' image […] rather it should be about producing images that would convey complexity of experience and feeling"[87]. It is within this context, of complexity of experience and feeling, that consideration will be given to role the images of photographers LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg play in countering the historical perception of African Americans.

LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg are living examples of artists who engage with cultures in order to contribute visual representations of African Americans, in the hope of ridding towns like Braddock and Watts of the negative stereotypical image that has been perpetuated in the media. Frazier and Lixenberg may have disparate backgrounds but they have a shared work ethic which brings to mind a quote by Anne Rutherford: "I do not forfeit my own grounded cultural experience to attempt to acquire an authoritative knowledge of the other... The core principles of our aesthetic systems - the way we think about images, what images are, what [photography] can do or be are profoundly cultural principles"[88]. The images of Frazier and Lixenberg do not only contain elements of visual style which are accessible by historical poetics but also have deep resonance as embodied frameworks for thinking and working with image. While Lixenberg is an outsider and a member of a 'privileged group', her aim is not to build on existing stereotypes of Watts but to counter the inaccurate image which has frequently been portrayed in photographs of African Americans. Frazier herself is an African American who seeks to shape the narrative about black people and their identity by offering a personal view of members of a specific black community. The images stand as visual resistance, create an oppositional subculture within the framework of domination and recognise that the field of representation (how we see ourselves, how others see us) is a site of ongoing struggle[89].

Before proceeding, it is necessary to refer to the recent discussions about cultural appropriation

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[86] Willis & Williams, 2002, p10.

[87] Hooks, 1992, p133.

[88] Rutherford, 2006, p72.

[89] Hooks, 1994, p46.

which would seemingly call into question the right of an artist to inhabit a culture which is not his own. Susan Scafidi, a law professor at Fordham University, has defined cultural appropriation as "taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artefacts from someone else's culture without permission"[90]. Its critics deny that they are opposed to cultural engagement but want to ensure that people from minority or indigenous backgrounds speak for themselves and are not seen solely through the eyes of another, typically more dominant, people or society. Today, certain antiracist activists even go so far as to claim that white painters should not portray black subjects[91]. So, what of white photographers like Dana Lixenberg? It can be argued that her purpose is to counter historically negative black stereotypes by producing images which seek to bring about positive change and that to deny her the right to photograph black subjects on these grounds would be unconscionable. As writer and lecturer Kenan Malik succinctly puts it, "writers and artists necessarily engage with the experience of others,"[92] everyone inhabits a culture, but nobody actually owns one. By inhabiting a culture the tools to reach out to others can be discovered[93]. In fact, cultural appropriation is a way for artists to discover cultures different to their own in order to spread knowledge of the people and societies that inhabit this world. Photography is an art form, yet we understand that it is also a medium which is suitable for retracing history and a tool that photographers use to educate others by revealing details and information that would otherwise remain hidden. If photographers like Dana Lixenberg were denied the right to document different cultures, the photographic discourse would remain one-sided and there might not even be a conversation.

This chapter will further investigate the effect that the divergent cultural backgrounds of Frazier and Lixenberg have on the representation of African Americans through the analysis of specific photographs from their projects. The investigation will also compare and contrast their work to photographs from the civil rights movement. The 'observational' and 'participatory' modes discussed in chapter two will be considered in order to afford thorough understanding of the approach of both photographers.

After studying a number of photographs from Frazier's *The Notion Of Family* and Lixenberg's *Imperial Courts*, certain parallels and distinctions can be drawn between the work of the two photographers. The shared objective of shedding positive light on otherwise hidden aspects of African American life and liberating the mind by offering a degree of tangible detail that was previously unknown is ever-present and constant. Both women seek, with varying degrees of success, to communicate the feeling or suggest the emotion conferred by activities, environments and interactions, whether it be the act of straightening one's hair or the celebration of a birthday. Each photographer is seen to adopt a distinct approach when taking photographs which results in two bodies of work that are separate and different in kind. Frazier's work can be described as exemplifying the 'participatory' mode. As a documentary photographer she interacts with her subjects rather than observing them unobtrusively. Lixenberg, on the other hand, adopts the 'observational' mode, meaning that she prefers to abandon all forms of control as regards the posing or arrangement of an image, and lets the viewer look in on life as it is. Although what happens before the camera is an index of the

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[90] Scafidi, 2005, p46.

[91] Malik, 2017.

[92] Malik, 2017.

[93] Malik, 2017.

interaction between the photographer and the subject, the photographs do not give the viewer enough to know what is going on. In this case they fail to reveal that Frazier is a member of the community she is photographing or that Lixenberg spent some time living in the Unites States of America and built up a relationship with members of the Imperial Courts community. The projects thus depend on a further layer of detail, sometimes from outside in the form of text, to establish context.

Although, as explained in chapter one, African Americans have developed a platform on which to stand and demand equality in rights and before the law, many individuals still suffer violent acts of discrimination yet continue to promote positive change in their country. It can be seen that words alone are not enough to dispel the discord between black social identity and social norms, and that photography was and remains a powerful tool to document and communicate not only the African American state of being but also their beliefs and hopes for the future. Inherent racial bias is expressed in social, professional and educational settings and is an intrinsic part of the African American condition, yet this bias may not be immediately evident. Bell Hooks has described the field of representation (how African Americans see themselves, how others see them) through photography and in everyday life as a site of ongoing struggle, allowing a parallel to be drawn with the previously discussed notion of 'double consciousness'. At first impression, the portraits which comprise *The Notion Of Family* and *Imperial Courts* do not appear politically charged or indicative of bias, although both projects could function as tools to instigate political and social change. In order to understand the stories fully, the viewer is required to have some existing understanding of the societal conditions in which the subjects live, or must be informed by captions accompanying the portraits or information provided by the photographers in addition to the photographs. The subjects' background stories are vitally important in both projects and, if the viewer is to comprehend the ongoing struggle faced by communities like Braddock and Watts, it becomes necessary for both photographers to consider the presentation of the projects outside of the print publications and, in the case of Lixenberg, outside the website, in the context of these stories.

Exercising the continuing authority that the camera bestows, allows photographers like LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg to step into communities and situations in order to represent the subjects in the way the subjects see themselves. Yet, as Susan Sontag has stated, "the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace […], cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude"[94]. This statement is given credence by Frazier and Lixenberg who have both affirmed that they do not speak directly for African Americans but seek to create a different image of them through photography. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the image is based on the careful selection and exclusion of photographs, and is thus dependent on the preference or intent of the photographer: the personal interests of the photographers are never far away. The projects depend on details: fragments of image from a series of encounters which accumulate layer upon layer to construct a story of African American life. It is important to remember, therefore, that the portraits are quotidian segments of a narrative which isolate a fragment of the community. Since they are only fragments of the whole, they do not inform the viewer conclusively and even if they are joined together, the story which emerges is still incomplete.

The frequency of racism as a manifestation of (violent) physical discrimination in America is well-

[94] Sontag, 2004, p46.

documented (fig. 27), albeit often from a Western perspective which serves to give African Americans a negative public face. It may therefore seem imprudent for individuals connected to gangs like the Crips and Bloods in Watts, which dominate the streets and battlegrounds, to give themselves a public face because by doing so they may jeopardise their own futures, as with the media's documentation of the Rodney King riots (fig. 27). However, photography also enables these individuals to unify as a body of African Americans and puts a human face on the African American civil rights movement in the mass media. It is therefore the primary means for alternative images to be disseminated. Contemporary representations of African Americans contribute to the public debate about issues of racism, and this inevitably means that people will be exposed to opinions different from their own and outside their social circle. Photographs invite the viewer not only to take a look but also to step back and reflect, so that when certain people or issues are to be given a public face it is important to consider what kind of context will best serve the subjects. In the case of the African Americans, it would be over-simplistic to offer a single counter black image to historically negative stereotypes. In other words, instead of one 'positive' image, it is necessary for African Americans to represent themselves from a variety of angles which reflect the complexities of their communities. This is intrinsically linked with the viewer. As modernist art critic and historian Michael Fried argues: "issues concerning the relationship between the photograph and the viewer standing before it became crucial for photography as they had never previously been"[95]. Most viewers look at a large photograph on a gallery wall differently than they would look at it in a book, or as a small print. They prepare themselves for a lengthy, meditative relationship with the image. Fried continues by stating that contemporary art photography inherited "the entire problematic of beholding", meaning art that depended upon the participation of the public was failed art. In the case of Lixenberg and Frazier, it becomes important to create a coherent and complete story. By including captions or short videos, a second layer can be added to the projects and further, personal, insight given into the lives of the residents of these communities. It would also help avoid misconceptions. This is known to be a successful addition since Lixenberg exhibited part of her project at Amsterdam's Huis Marseille in 2015 and accompanied the photographs by a 70 minute video and audio recording which exposed the viewer to the community and the residents' reactions to Lixenberg's work. Revealing tangible details that were previously hidden behind existing negative stereotypes, sheds new light on the complexity of experience and feeling that makes up African American history and culture,

This variety is evident in the photographic projects of Lixenberg and Frazier. The image *Mercedes, Shawna, Moe* (fig. 9) embodies a voyeuristic element which can be traced back to images of African women in the 19th century (fig. 17). The photographs from previous centuries presented aspects of the female body like the "buttocks and breasts [as] the primary focus"[96]. During this period, the face of the woman was deemed an unimportant element of the body and photograph. Italian photographic archivist Nicolas Monti states: "the curves are abundant, the back is sumptuous, and the hips are magnificently shaped"[97], meaning the photographer and the viewer were fascinated by the body parts that exuded female sexuality: the African woman was a sex symbol. When this image is compared to Lixenberg's *Mercedes, Shawna, Moe* a parallel

[95] Fried, 1988.

[96] Willis, 1994, p19.

[97] Willis, 1994, p19.

can be drawn between the poses. The three young women portrayed in this photograph become objects of desire, in this case not necessarily for their bodies as they are fully clothed, but as individuals. They are placed in the centre of the frame, without any distractions in the background. Besides the hat, there are few clothing items to divert the viewer's attention from the women themselves. They are playing and posing, and it is clearly not a snapshot of a situation that Lixenberg encountered, instead these women have chosen to be photographed in this way, incorporating both female empowerment and a playful aspect[98]. Although the pose is reminiscent of 19th century photographs, the intent of Lixenberg's photograph is not to exploit these women for their bodies or to study them as exotic objects, but to represent them in their own right, as individuals. Returning to the issue of cultural appropriation, to suggest that Lixenberg should not portray black subjects is disturbing since her act of photographing these subjects is, in the words of Kenan Malik, "an act of radical sympathy and imaginative identification across racial lines"[99]. Opting to challenge the stereotypes is significant because it approaches "the human cost of political indifference and neglect"[100] from a different point of view, while still making it visible. As stated before, neither Frazier nor Lixenberg pretends to speak for all African Americans[101] or even the black communities living in Watts and Braddock. Instead, they provide an insight into the communities in order to help document the residents as people rather than archetypes[102]. The rationale behind these photographs is therefore not to perpetuate the notion of victimisation, but to help create a counter perspective of African Americans within a broader historical framework. This may not be immediately obvious in the portraits however the viewer does understand that the subjects are of importance because the photographers have made clear choices in the mode of documentation and the central placement of the subjects.

Unlike Lixenberg, Frazier adds an extra dimension to her work by allowing the viewer to enter her own home. While the city street can be considered a place of random encounter, the home is a place of intimate habit. Emotional distance is commonplace on the street, but unacceptable in the home. Nevertheless, the discourse between the two locations is far from discrete: the street presses into the home. It is a place that is vulnerable to the threat of violence, and to the prejudice and fear that abound outside. While vulnerable, the home nevertheless possesses a subtle power of its own. It is able to bind subjects in shared experiences, in the hope of restoring them in the midst of struggle. *The Notion Of Family* documents these issues with much verve. Frazier reveals the power Elizabeth Alexander referred to as "the black interior": a vision of black life and creativity that exists "behind the public face of stereotype and limited imagination"[103]. Frazier is able to help us "envision what we are not meant to envision; complex black selves, real and enactable black power, rampant and unfetishised black beauty"[104]. Consider the photographs *Momme* (fig. 7) and *Momme relaxing my hair* (fig. 1). In both instances Frazier and her mother are gazing

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[98] Ikamara Larasi wrote an interesting article about why music videos portray black women as exotic sex objects, stating that certain caucasian artists (like female singer Miley Cyrus) even dress like male African American rappers, whilst black females surround her like accessories. The work of Lixenberg thus becomes more important because, although the poses of these women are similar to the 19th century photographs and embody elements showcased in music videos, here they choose to pose this way. In their own right.

[99] Malik, 2017.

[100] Frazier, 2014.

[101] Lixenberg, 2014.

[102] Lixenberg, 2017.

[103] Alexander, 2004, pX.

[104] Alexander, 2004, pX.

into the mirror. This could reflect the moment, diagnosed by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, of child self-recognition also referred to as the 'mirror stage', the critical phase of human development in which the baby sees itself as distinct from its mother. It is clear that Frazier no longer is a baby, however it seems that both women have a moment of recognition in which they see themselves as individuals. Lacan describes this moment as the collapse of the human ego that led us to construct everyone else as the 'other'. Yet, in this case, is it really the collapse of the female ego? The photograph *Momme* (fig. 7) defines a different mirror stage: a mother standing near the door opening, further away from her daughter who seems to hold the same pose. It is the pure embodiment of the fragile ways of femininity although, here, their self-gazing functions as a reparative act: learning to be able to see each other, their black female selves, in spite of the racial invisibility into which they both were born. This photograph contains far more complexities than Carrie Mae Weems' (1953) photograph *Untitled (Woman and daughter with Makeup)* (fig. 20) which represents the child-like reflection of a young girl who has not yet been taught to un-love herself and who has not been asked, as W.E.B. Du Bois once wrote: "how does it feel to be a problem?"[105]. This photograph highlights the simplicity of life by revealing how African Americans live and act behind closed doors. It dispels any suspicion of a smouldering volcano beneath the stereotypically tough outside.

As discussed in chapter one, during the civil rights movement, photographs taken in everyday life, snapshots in particular, rebelled against all of those photographic practices that re-inscribed colonial ways of looking and capturing the images of the black "other". Shot spontaneously, without any notion of remaking black bodies in the image of whiteness, snapshots posed a challenge to black viewers. Unlike photographs constructed so that black images would appear as the embodiment of colonising fantasies, these snapshots gave African Americans a way to see themselves, a sense of how they looked when they were not wearing the mask, when they were not attempting to perfect the image for a white supremacist gaze[106]. African Americans struggled with the issue of representation which was, itself, closely linked to the issue of documentation, hence the importance of photography[107]. The camera was the central instrument with which they could disprove representations created by white folks. While Frazier and Lixenberg both seek to assist their subjects by portraying them in a manner that conveys a carefully chosen message, as stated before, clear differences can be seen in the way in which the photographs are executed. While neither project attempts to provide a systemic explanation of the black experience: we see no images of the tragedies of the welfare office, the violence of the police state, rather the ravages of urban transiency, Frazier does include photographs which present a poorer, more complex lifestyle (fig.2). In that sense it can be argued that Lixenberg's work involves a fundamental conceit. For while her images necessarily sustain the rhetoric of an implied will possessed by the subjects represented, the difference lies in the construction of a vision of blacks or a vision of a black world that is not thwarted by the limits of biological destiny that would impute blame back to them. Instead, throughout Lixenberg's project, we witness fragments of the very type of work and play that remain concealed in the images of Frazier.

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[105] Aperture, 2016, p54.

[106] Willis, 1994, p50.

[107] Willis, 1994, p48.

It has been explained how Frazier and Lixenberg use their cameras in distinct ways and that this partly accounts for the differences in the photographs, yet it is not a satisfactory explanation for everything. It is relevant to note that although the photographs *Mom relaxing my hair* (fig. 1) by Frazier and *Trayvon, Nunu, China, June* (fig. 12) by Lixenberg both appear rather sombre and dramatic in terms of their composition, further examination of the works reveals how the photographers' diverse approaches create distinctly different stories. The prime intention of both Frazier and Lixenberg is to highlight the importance of the context and situation in which the subjects find themselves. However, unlike Lixenberg, Frazier's mode embodies certain elements of the style of photography referred to as the 'snapshot' during the civil rights movement. These casual photographs were 'shot' spontaneously and quickly, and decorated the walls of many African American homes[108]. Some of these snapshots resemble an image of *Richard Miller* from the 1960s (fig. 18). A dapper young man neatly dressed in a suit is portrayed. Miller was probably urged by his parents, in the same way many others entreated their sons across America, to dress neatly. By doing so, they would not be followed in department stores or stopped for looking suspicious. Similarly, early civil rights freedom riders were encouraged to wear clean white shirts and ties so that they would be respected. Bearing these urgings in mind, it is interesting to compare the image *Veodis Watkins* (fig. 22) with work by Lixenberg with regard to the clothing that is worn, the framing of the image and the surroundings. During the civil rights movement, images like Veodis Watkins were not to be distributed. The daughter of the man portrayed in this photograph described the image as "a horrible photograph. It is disgusting. He's not even wearing a shirt, just an old white undershirt"[109]. The reading and experience of this image is affected by history. At the time the photograph was made, this man would probably have been understood to be poor, even untrustworthy, because he is not wearing a suit and tie. Today, if we compare this photograph to the images of Lixenberg and also Frazier, the man seems like an everyday man, full of glory and content. The significance of particular details is therefore understood to change in accordance with the historical context.

Nevertheless, it is clear from an examination of photographs produced during the civil rights movement that while some, like Richard Miller, adopted a mask to avoid harassment, other African Americans were already busy creating an oppositional subculture. This involved constructing their own identities within the culture of the civil rights movement and decorating the walls of their own homes was an essential part of the process of decolonisation. Since the photographic work of black artists had not yet entered the museum, these walls served as gallery spaces. Contrary to colonising socialisation and internalised racism, African Americans announced their visual complexity. They saw themselves represented in these images not as caricatures or cartoon-like figures but as individuals in full diversity of body, being, and expression. Reflecting the way African Americans looked at themselves in those private spaces, where this view was not overseen by a white colonising eye or white supremacist gaze, these images created ruptures in their experience of the visual. They challenged both white perceptions of blackness and the realm of black-produced image-making that reflected internalised racism, creating a visual fascination for viewers which can be characterised as a powerlessness before the image.

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[108] See fig. 23 for an example.

[109] Hooks, 1994, p44.

A raw example of a snapshot, which can be related to the work of Frazier, is an image by French photographer John Launois called *Hard Core Poverty* (fig. 16). A single-parent family of six is portrayed bleakly in the corner of a ramshackle room. All the signs of poverty are here. Paint is peeling from every wall and, in the upper-left corner of the room, there is a large hole. The sense of overcrowding is overwhelming. All of American life's daily household chores and functions are confined to this one room. In noting that this is a black and white photograph[110], it is impossible to ignore the similarities between the family's skin colour and that of the surrounding walls; the play of light and shadow on their faces, mimicking the walls, and almost comically repeated in the pattern of the mother and son's shirts[111]. Moreover, they all wear clothing that is tattered. More often than not, for the family portrait produced at home, some attempt is made, through the use of props or staging, to add further significance to the scene - posing near the fireplace or the family trophy chest, with paintings or photographs in the background, or clutching memorabilia in one's hand. But other than the clothes on their backs, this family appears to have no possessions. These absences do more than present to us the reality of hard-core poverty, or, for our sociological appetites, place on display a concrete example of a dysfunctional family structure outside the realm of the norm. In the context of ideology, such possessions serve not only as descriptives of a given family's social standing, but can also inscribe the family into the grand narrative of history, culture and society. In this case, it seems that race has muddled with their potential and that their living conditions are the result of this. When a comparison is made with Frazier's self-portrait (fig. 2), the first difference to be noted is that unlike Launois, the photographer - in this case Frazier herself - does not inhabit the role of outsider but portrays a similar poverty-driven familial situation from an insider's perspective. As a documentary photographer, she does not ask her subjects to pose for her, altogether, in one space yet, by reason of her status as a member of the community, she does more than unobtrusively observe. While the viewer sees the same neglected elements as the house in *Hard Core Poverty*, he is also brought into contact with the image "in a way that blurs the boundaries between self and other, viewer and subject, inside and outside"[112]. He is exposed to another level of intensity and feels as though he is present in the bathroom as she stares at herself in the mirror (fig. 2), or in the living room (fig. 4) about to sit down on the couch next to her and her sister. It is interesting to note that another element of the 'observational' mode also manifests itself here, as only seldom do the subjects acknowledge the presence of the camera.

While conventional documentary forms claim universal neutrality, film critic and theoretician Bill Nichols asks "If knowledge arises, in large part, from subjective, embodied experience, and to what extent can it be represented by impersonal and disembodied language?"[113]. If it is accepted that documentation and art do not occupy a necessarily exclusionary relationship, it can be argued that Frazier's work is no less revealing for being informed by her own experience. There is no shame in *The Notion Of Family*, instead it is an honest depiction by Frazier of a family situation in which the subjects have been subjected to abuse, possibly

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[110] This may have been the reason that Frazier and Lixenberg both opted for black and white images, however it could be to avoid judgment based on colour. Important to note is that Lixenberg later incorporated colour in her work through means of film.

[111] Rogers, 1994, p159.

[112] Rutherford, 2006, p.72.

[113] Renov, 2012, p174.

of a racist nature. Bell Hooks has referred to the necessity for producing images that convey complexity of experience and feeling, and it therefore becomes important to recall the muddied surfaces, dark corners, and looming shadows of Frazier's images. It is these environmental factors that provide the meaningful spaces across which the African American body defines itself and its meaning within the image.

Like Frazier's *The Notion Of Family,* Lixenberg's work contains elements of documentary story-telling in combination with characteristics of portrait photography (as described in chapter 1). This statement is derived from the fact that neither photographer centres interest solely on the faces of the African Americans but, instead, includes a backdrop in the images. The purpose of this backdrop is to create a better understanding of not only the person but also their living conditions. In Lixenberg's case, the images reveal the living conditions from the perspective of an outsider. All of her photographs are taken en plein air. Not one photograph included in *Imperial Courts* depicts the interior of a house. The focus lies on her subjects' everyday life from the outside; that includes work and play. In (fig. 13) Lixenberg documents a typical birthday party hosted in the housing complex. The photograph is devoid of people but reveals how much effort has gone into the festivities. This particular photograph breaks with the mode of documentation she uses in her project since, by adding a frivolous element of hope and happiness, she might be said to have abandoned, albeit momentarily, the detachment with which she observes this community. Although Lixenberg's photographs do not necessarily break down all barriers between photographer and subject, no two poses are the same and this gives credence to the suggestion that she has abandoned all forms of control as regards the posing or arranging of her images. Each individual is therefore free to represent himself in the manner he chooses. Her adoption of the 'observational' mode serves to reinforce the proposition that while these individuals belong to a group and are bound together, they are also particular people who wish to be seen as such. This is evidenced in the photograph *Jennifer, Yasmine, Jasonnae* (fig. 8), which portrays three young girls, amusing themselves[114] at the playground. As with the image of the birthday celebration, the photograph of these three young girls counters the bulk of the images in Lixenberg's project, which primarily consists of black and white portraits of individuals who live with the systematic oppression associated with being African American and the tensions occasioned by gang life. *Jennifer, Yasmine, Jasonnae* (fig. 8) presents an alternative view of life that is led at Imperial Courts. It highlights the children's celebration of life, even if economic and cultural achievement remains out of reach. Their expressions and reactions to Lixenberg taking a picture are child-like and enthusiastic, as evidenced by the cheeky smiles on their faces and the unexpected pose of the little girl crawling on the floor. By including a playful element, whereby the children are able to be themselves, pulling funny faces instead of hiding from the camera or striking tough poses, Lixenberg lightens the atmosphere and introduces an element of hope. She also draws attention to the child-like aspect which is present in these communities and would be lost if the stern and serious gazes of an older generation (for example, fig. 12) were the principal element on display. The image gives credence to the children's obliviousness to stereotypes and archetypes, elements which are evident in other images like fig. 12. As previously discussed, the two men on the left in fig. 12, in particular, maintain the appearance of tough African Americans living in city neighbourhoods. Upon closer

[114] These young girls may still be in search of their ideologies, and are thus less set in their norms and values. This may affect how they view the world around them, a stereotypical childlike vision of the world that remains untinged.

observation, however, they look far from dangerous. They all make eye contact[115] with the camera lens, weary of what might happen and ready to take action if necessary. The girl, on the other hand, has a casual stance that is less threatening. As mentioned in chapter one, the fact that each figure documented by Lixenberg stares straight at the photographer, or viewer, reinforces the element of distance which characterises her work. The viewer is not offered the space to observe and absorb, instead he is instantly confronted with an intense stare that is hard to avoid. To capture the attitude of African Americans on film, without categorising their posture as sassy, docile, and/or threatening is a transformative act. Lixenberg is a photographer from outside the community nevertheless, her approach, while fundamentally 'observational' and impassive, produces a series of photographs which can be appreciated for their richness and intensity, and for countering the stereotypical gangland images of the residents of Imperial Courts which have been used historically in the media, and beyond.

Lixenberg's approach can be compared to that of African American photographer James Van Der Zee during the civil rights movement and, in particular, his photograph *Raccoon Couple in Car* (fig. 14), a photograph which raised a whirlwind of social and photographic questions[116]. Van Der Zee was a photographic pioneer during the civil rights movement as he attempted to counter the negative image of black life in Harlem. According to photographic historian Deborah Willis, the " Raccoon Couple perfectly symbolised, in my mind, the celebration of black life and economic and cultural achievement." The car is parked away from the sidewalk, the woman is wearing a full-length raccoon coat, as is the man. He is partly seated in the car on the passenger's side and she is standing in the street. During this period, Harlem was a source of pride, and Van DerZee empowered his subjects for posterity. As a time when Harlem was struggling to survive the Depression years, his photograph broke the prevailing stereotype of this New York neighbourhood. The couple appears to be distant, yet charming. There is a sense of spontaneity. This image creates the idea that life during the Harlem Renaissance must have been vibrant, supportive, and prideful[117] and thus defies the objectified images of African Americans made by many photographers from outside the community[118]. It allows African Americans to look at and reclaim their neighbourhoods, and to identify the community as a place with a distinctive and productive personality. It also counters the stereotypes shown in other images, like Jack Manning's photograph of Elk's Parade[119], by shedding positive light on a complex situation and revealing a different, more positive aspect of the lives of African Americans. While Lixenberg and Van Der Zee both opt for black and white images to achieve their shared goal, namely the empowerment of people, their stylistic choices are essentially different. Consider the image *Nunu & China* (fig. 10). The set-up is the same as in *Raccoon Couple in Car* (fig. 14). Both couples are distant, yet charming, although Lixenberg's image of Nunu and China has an authentic element which is lacking in the work of Van Der Zee. Rather than dressing dapperly when leaving the home, as in *Raccoon Couple in Car*, to keep up appearances, Nunu and

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[115] Relates to Fried's notion of absorption from 1988 as mentioned on p.19.

[116] Willis, 1994, p8.

[117] Willis, 1994, p9.

[118] Willis, 1994, p10.

[119] As mentioned in chapter one Jack Mannings photograph of Elks Parade (fig. 19) was not meant to depict a negative image of African Americans, however, the photograph landed in the hands of the media. The photograph was accompanied by a caption that did not coincide with the content of the image, and thus spread a stereotypically negative image of the African American community.

China wear casual everyday clothes that might be worn by people of all socioeconomic classes in Northern America. The simple background does not distract from the individuals at the centre of the frame, highlighting that they are important and worthy of noticing. This comparison leads us to understand that during the civil rights movement it was important for African Americans to dress dapper in order to belong and feel welcome, but that as more Western and African American photographers started to document previously hidden aspects of life in communities like Watts, appearance has become an expression of individuality not social class. No longer do residents dress dapper in order to convince others that they are not violent or dangerous, although the notion of keeping up appearances is sometimes evident and can belie the living conditions at home, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Thus the intent of photographs created by Lixenberg is not necessarily to Westernise the image of African American communities, as seen in Van Der Zee's photograph, but to counter the poverty and violence driven images that were frequently distributed. It is not about comparing African American communities to Western communities, rather a discussion about creating a different vision and perception of blacks.

During the process of creating counter images, the family has become politicised, although this is not an entirely new phenomenon. An example from 1959 is a photograph of Malcolm X and his family (fig. 15). Here, the photograph becomes more than a family affair; it is also a political statement. Malcolm is seen as the husband and father. His wife, Betty Shabazz, is smiling quietly and looking admiringly at her husband as he appears to be reading a book. The floors are shiny and there are plastic slipcovers on the couch, of the sort commonly seen on furniture in the late fifties and early sixties in middle-class American homes. The family looks out of place in the scantily furnished room. Stripped of familiar and familial materials, it appears to have less of an identity, particularly when compared to some African American homes whose walls were filled with snapshots of family. Photographs frequently reveal how a family has lived, but Malcolm X was a public figure and the majority of his family photographs have not been published. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the conventional public image we have of him is preserved in this private image. He is dressed formally, his furniture looks uncomfortable and it appears as though he has no time off. A parallel can be drawn with the work of Frazier, although her images are more confronting and raw. The photograph of Malcolm X and family reflects the style of photography that was popular during the civil rights movement, when African Americans felt they needed to keep up appearances under the Western gaze. This notion of keeping appearances is evident in Frazier's work in the portrait of her mum (fig. 3) where she appears dressed up, sitting on the bed wearing a wig, ready to leave the house. It can be seen, therefore, that keeping up appearances, a prominent means of avoiding trouble during the civil rights movement, is a notion that continues today within a larger historical context. Frazier's documentation of family is understood to give a distinct window into a particular portion of her world, and when comparing her work to that of Lixenberg and earlier photographers, it is salient to bear the words of Susan Sontag in mind. She wrote: "with subjects closer to home, the photographer is expected to be more discreet"[120], suggesting that Frazier's confrontational exposure of her family remains protected by an emotional layer, which rounds off the hard edges and may cause the project to resound with a wider audience.

When considering Frazier and Lixenberg, it is reasonable to say that their respective experiences, social circumstances and education are disparate, and that this disparity has had an impact on the approach

[120] Sontag, 2004, p62.

each adopts when narrating the stories of African Americans. Frazier grew up in similar conditions and surroundings to those individuals she has photographed. As an African American, she has experienced discrimination on the basis of race. Given that the project is a partnership between her and her mother, between photographer and subject, Frazier's own pain is also reflected in the images. Lixenberg's work does not possess this level of personal involvement. She had a conventional Western upbringing which did not require her to fight for basic rights in the same way as African Americans. It might be tempting to argue, therefore, that the interaction between the photographers and their subjects can be characterised as 'I speak about them to you' (Lixenberg, distant) and 'I speak with them for us' (Frazier, personal). While this is partly true, it ignores the fact that Lixenberg integrated in America over the course of many years, acquired knowledge of the codes in use and consequently applied her knowledge of these codes to *Imperial Courts*: "In '93 I focused mostly on individual portraits, to capture the charisma of these very strong individuals, partly in reaction to the extremely one dimensional portrayal by the media at the time,"[121] however when she continued in 2008, and as her connection with the community grew more personal, she re-photographed some of the same people and their children. This helped to expand her scope and directed her towards recording sound, film and shooting still-lives and landscapes. It also expanded her understanding of family relations and connections, and inspired her to develop her project further. Lixenberg noted, given the constant struggle between the Bloods and Crips, every time she returned more people would have died, and all that remained of them was a photograph. Snapshots or professional portraits were placed in specific settings so that a relationship with the dead could be continued[122]. They were and remain a mediation between the living and the dead[123]. This element of photograph-making speaks specifically and directly to a black audience and would probably not be understood by others. As previously mentioned, it becomes important for the photographers to accompany the images with text, or another source of information, so that viewers are able to read the complete history of a single image.

Continuing the comparison of work by Frazier and Lixenberg, it might also be argued that Lixenberg's work could be expected to contain visual evidence of the Western gaze by reason of her Dutch origins, but that would be simplistic. Notwithstanding, and possibly by reason of her culture, she is well placed to promote social justice. Considering the photograph *Dominos* (fig. 21) it can be seen that Lixenberg's images contain few stereotypical elements that many Westerners, or outsiders in general, would connect with communities like Watts. This image portrays a group of older men, sitting at a round table playing a game of cards. In the background, there is a washing line and some broken pieces of furniture. There is nothing dramatic, threatening or inhumane about this situation. It becomes difficult to imagine that everyone living in the Imperial Courts housing complex is dangerous and out to kill their enemies. What does become clear is that these individuals are content with little: there is no grass, the chairs are mismatched and the table has seen better days. These images reveal a segment of innocuous quotidian life, without coming too close. Frazier, on the other hand, counters negative stereotypes of African Americans in towns like Braddock and Watts by revealing otherwise hidden aspects of individual lives there. When analysing Frazier's portrait (fig. 7), it can be said that this image contains no visual evidence of an outsider's gaze and

[121] Lixenberg, 2014.

[122] Willis, 1994, p51.

[123] Willis, 1994, p52.

that the 'participatory' mode is evident. This portrait is of Frazier and her mother, who has experienced discrimination in her own home town, partly because of her addiction to crack cocaine[124]. Frazier portrays both her mother and herself in a stern and powerful manner which manifests itself in the women's unflinching gaze into the camera, albeit through the reflection in the mirror: almost as if the mirror were able to reflect the truth of their situation. Neither woman seems particularly interested in her physical appearance, as evidenced by the choice of clothes, lack of accessories and the way each wears her hair. This collection of elements results in a somewhat masculine, and tough, exterior which reflects the situation in which they find themselves daily. It is an image that presents a clear contrast to the photograph of beauty rituals (fig. 1) discussed previously and may hint towards the appearance that these women feel they must maintain in order to survive the harsh reality of everyday life. Together with her mother, Frazier shows that they have power and agency when recording these images. The conversation being held is one between mother and daughter which is, at the same time, both social and non-judgmental. They have clearly taken control of the manner in which they are represented. Frequently we perceive the photographer as the photographer and the subject as the subject, but in this series the roles are intertwined and interchangeable since both mother and daughter operate the camera and both are recorded as images. They, not the viewer, hold the power. To both women, power is communicated by representing their true selves, and making themselves vulnerable**.** Even if the photograph is posed, it is an outcome which is shared and desired by the subjects, and has not been imposed on them. The authority and power of this portrait contrasts with the visual representations of African Americans from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries discussed previously. As an African American woman, Frazier is well placed to represent if not all, then certainly a number of African Americans. It could also be argued that, unlike Lixenberg, she has inevitably defined her subjects in terms of herself because she documents her own family through her eyes as an African American woman.

What then of the relationship between African Americans, contemporary white Western photographers like Dana Lixenberg and the gaze of an outsider? The right of an artist to inhabit a culture that is not his own and so the right of a white photographer to document black culture have been discussed earlier in this chapter in the context of cultural appropriation. Since each person's reality is one of multiplicity, there is a powerful argument for supporting the layering in of multiple potential experiences, provided in this case by a white photographer, in order to reach a heterogeneous audience. The question is thus whether being an outsider plays an important role with regard to the authenticity and quality of the images produced. When analysing the image *Shamilia & Quintina* (fig. 11), unlike Frazier's work, there is visual evidence of the outsider gaze. This image was shot in 1993 at the beginning of the project when Lixenberg focused mostly on individual portraits in order to capture the essence of the persons being photographed. Her reason for doing this was, in part, a reaction to the one dimensional portrayal by the media at the time which, as explained above, reduced the inhabitants and the complex, cultural situation to gangland stereotypes. Over the years, the Imperial Courts housing complex has evolved from being the epicentre of race riots, which followed the death of Rodney King, to an anonymous deprived neighbourhood. Shamillia and Quintina are portrayed fully clothed in the centre of the frame, drawing attention to the fact that they are individuals who are worth noticing. Here, like the majority of Lixenberg's portraits, the subjects stare straight into the lens, making eye

[124] Frazier, 2014.

contact with the photographer and the viewer. Their nonchalant posture embodies power and confidence, although the clothing of the girl sitting on the bike saddle resembles the uniform of lower-class workers and the girl on the left seems to be wearing a school uniform. To a black viewer, the school uniform might hint towards an additional element of power, suggesting that her family is in a position to pay school fees. However, it could also be a historical reference to the time when young African American boys and girls were told to dress nicely in order to avoid being harassed when outside the home. As previously stated, it is known that Lixenberg has a deep understanding of matters that have shaped contemporary African American communities like Watts and it can be observed, therefore, that her divergent cultural background has not led her to trivialise the subjects of her portraits or to assert her command over them. Nevertheless, the somewhat static pose of the subjects and lack of personal interaction suggest that an outsider's gaze is involved. This gaze does not belittle the subjects as they are not defined in terms of the identity of the photographer. Instead Lixenberg portrays them with an air of pride, glory and power, very much like Van Der Zee's documentation of his fellow African Americans living in Harlem. Lixenberg herself has said that she does not want to use a person to illustrate a story, but wants each image to be its own self-contained story, a fragment, which, as a body of work, presents the community and accurately reflects their lived experience**.** Thus, in general terms, Lixenberg highlights the fragility of human life as well as the inevitable downside and consequences of the African American condition which, in the case of Imperial Courts, sometimes culminates in feelings of alienation. Although an intimate connection between photographer and subject is absent, we might ask ourselves whether it is necessary since, in this case, the images can be described as authentic and of high quality.

Cultural sociologist Richard Howells has discussed the connection between painter and viewer, and his comments could apply equally to photographer and viewer: "The successful communication of these meanings, however, depends on shared cultural conventions between [photographer] and viewer. Knowing the codes - or at least knowing that there are codes in use - is all a part of visual literacy."[125] In the case of Frazier and Lixenberg it can be argued that although they have disparate backgrounds, they share the cultural conventions of their subjects: one by reason of birth, the other by acquisition of knowledge. By representing subtly different angles of a shared purpose, they assist their subjects more effectively in disseminating the truth about African Americans to a far larger public. This argument is also borne out by the writings of Michael Renov, professor of Critical Studies at University of Southern California, who describes how documentary has increasingly turned to the local and the specific, how its pretensions to objectivity have collapsed and how 'subjective' knowledge has become increasingly privileged[126]. In other words, it is more enriching, interesting and real for photographers like Frazier and Lixenberg to communicate a manifold variety of experiences, thoughts, definitions and fragments which span a large amount of history and constitute their personal identity, when documenting the communities of Braddock and Watts. Then, in the context of the current debate about cultural appropriation it would seem appropriate for an 'outsider' like Lixenberg to document a culture that is not her own. Her work is not only a means with which to retrace history, it is also a tool with which to educate others both objectively and authentically.

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[125] Howells, 2012, p17.

[126] Renov, 2012, p12-36.

In conclusion, photographers LaToya Ruby Frazier and Dana Lixenberg approach a similar subject in a distinct manner. Their approaches are reflected in the elements of classical documentary portraiture and technique each uses to produce rich and layered visual representations of their subjects. The type of photography practised by both women focuses on common cultural, visual and narrative clues in an effort to bridge the gap between the photographer and the subject, as well as the photographer and the viewer, in the hope that people will be brought closer together. In these circumstances it is difficult to agree with the critics of cultural appropriation who would deny Lixenberg the right to photograph black subjects. It can be seen from the writing above that photographers like her have a role to play in shaping the narrative about black people and their non-stereotypical identity. In fact, photographers like Lixenberg participate in the process that was begun by African Americans to counter the negative stereotypical image of blacks that was disseminated during the civil rights movement. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes of documentary can be seen to influence not only the method but also the final results. While Lixenberg's work does not contain many evident signs of the outsider's gaze, her work is characterised by a degree of impassivity which manifests itself in a drier, more reasoned narrative, probably by reason of her background. Frazier's approach tells the tale from an insider's perspective. Her images can be seen to carry more emotion, dismay and resentment than those of Lixenberg, which may leave her work open to criticism for being particularly personal. In both cases the viewer needs extra information to gain a full understanding of the stories. Thus it becomes clear that the distinct approaches adopted by each photographer are due, to a large extent, to their culturally divergent backgrounds. While it cannot be said with certainty whether the use of the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes in the photographic projects is directly attributable to upbringing, the projects can be seen to differ in distinct ways. The distance in Lixenberg's work may stem from the fact that she is an 'outsider' rather than part of the community she photographed and that all her images are taken en plein air rather than in the home. The poses that are documented reflect the notion of 'theatricality' as introduced by Fried and the poses her subjects strike have a huge impact on the nature of her project, but also how her subjects are viewed by outsiders. In the 19th century, for example, African American women were photographed as objects of desire, however the women documented by Lixenberg seem to empower themselves through the poses they strike, as seen in fig. 9. On the basis of the project as a whole, had there been more photographs of individuals fully absorbed in their daily chores, without making eye contact with the photographer or viewer, *Imperial Courts* might have acquired a new dimension which welcomed the viewer into the lives of these African Americans. Frazier, on the other hand, as an insider, is able to welcome the viewer into the home of her subjects by means of 'absorption'.

It is also possible to infer that these differences are beneficial to shaping the narrative about African Americans and their identity, in that two photographers of disparate backgrounds representing two angles of a shared purpose are more effective in communicating the shared message of African Americans to a larger public. It can be seen that both photographers have exercised the continued authority that a camera allows to step into communities and situations with an understanding of the codes in use. Not only have they looked, but they have also reflected and commented, and the consequence is a series of images in which the subjects are treated respectfully. Finally, both projects subconsciously adopt important elements of photography established during the civil rights movement and use these to construct an African American

identity which cuts across racial lines, exposing the hidden aspects of their lives and liberates the mind by offering facts and data that were previously unknown.

Conclusion

It can be seen that photography played, and continues to play, a significant role in the lives of African Americans. This has become evident through the study of the historical portrayal of blacks in America during times of slavery and throughout the civil rights movement. It was a tool that helped African Americans insert themselves into the conversation because they were able to control how they were portrayed. They took back control over their own lives by means of photography, however the way they photographed themselves - often crisp and clean - was a reflection of how the whites would accept them into society. Today, photography remains a tool with which to discover and demonstrate relationships that are subtle or difficult to observe. It provides us with a degree of tangible detail about the lives of individuals which would otherwise remain hidden, and makes it possible to document these individuals both as they see themselves, as with Frazier, and how others see them, in the case of Lixenberg. Over time, the nature of documentary photography can be seen to have changed, and its historical pretensions to objectivity have increasingly given way to the local and specific. Knowledge gained from subjective, embodied experience can be said to form the cornerstone of the two photographic projects which are considered here.

Notwithstanding the shared subject, the projects of Frazier and Lixenberg remain distinct. Recalling Bill Nichols' question "if knowledge arises, in large part, from subjective, embodied experience, to what extent can it be represented by impersonal and disembodied language?" helps us gain an understanding of the 'participatory' and 'observational' documentary modes in the field of representation. The 'participatory' mode involves interaction with the subject, tends to be more intimate and emotional, and, in the case of the images which comprise the two projects that are the subject of this essay, embodies certain elements that speak directly and specifically to a black audience, and may not be understood by other viewers. LaToya Ruby Frazier's work calls upon the 'participatory' mode insofar as she includes herself and her family in numerous portraits. While her intimate relationship with the community of Braddock may not be immediately apparent in the images, it is important to know since the *The Notion Of Family* project does not construct a story of just any African American community living in Braddock, it is a personal documentation of her own family. Thus the authenticity and quality of Frazier's images might be clouded by her emotions, and the intimacy of her images might cause members of a diverse audience to retreat rather than to empathise. This is in contrast to the 'observational' mode which characterises Dana Lixenberg's project, and involves the abandonment of control as regards the posing and framing of an image. The viewer looks on life as it is, the subjects engage with each other and frequently ignore the camera completely. It must be noted, however, that the detailed examination of images throughout this essay, particularly in chapter two, reveals that while Frazier and Lixenberg are generally seen to adopt one particular mode in accordance with their respective experiences and positions in the community: in Frazier's case the 'participatory' mode and in Lixenberg's case the 'observational' mode, they nevertheless also use elements from both modes.

It is possible to identify a number of similarities in the work of Frazier and Lixenberg and their respective projects. It is understood that words alone are not sufficient to explain or convey the complexity of the African American experience, and the mass appeal of photography renders it a powerful tool with which to reveal a side of communities like Braddock and Watts that would otherwise remain unknown. Images provide a degree of tangible detail and a series of solo images combines to produce a rich, layered narrative of life there. By visualising the aspects of life that words cannot adequately convey, the viewer is able to gain

a fuller understanding of the complexity of experience and feeling that exists in these communities. The images also serve to counter prevailing stereotypes in the media. While the images of Frazier and Lixenberg do not directly rewrite history, they are a significant part of the discourse about the historical and contemporary representation of African Americans. At the beginning of this essay, a question was posed about the disparate cultural backgrounds of the two photographers and what effect this might have on the outcome of their projects. Throughout the analysis it has become apparent the photographic practices of Frazier and Lixenberg focus on common cultural, visual and narrative clues which aim to bring photographer, subject and viewer closer together. Notwithstanding the current debate about cultural appropriation, it can be said with certainty that the documentation of African American communities through the eyes of white photographers, like Lixenberg, is necessary. Her work may be characterised by an element of impassivity which can possibly be attributed to her Western background and outsider perspective, and results in a rather static approach to her subject, *Imperial Courts* nevertheless remains a powerful project which counters the negative historical stereotypical images of African Americans that have been perpetuated by the media. In fact, she participates in the process that was begun by African Americans during the civil rights movement and which sought to improve their state-of-being by promoting positive self-representation. Frazier's images reveal the hidden stories inside the home. Her work has an evident emotional layer, by reason of her insider position in the community, which offers an honest, albeit potentially one-sided, counter-image of black life. By focusing on her family she is able to suggest the emotion imparted by innocent quotidian activities, environments and interactions. The emotion in her images may be too intense for some viewers, but they do bring to life a new kind of encounter and draw the viewer into proximity with her life in Braddock. It is possible to conclude that, together, Lixenberg and Frazier, with their divergent backgrounds and approaches produce a richer, more diverse and accessible representation of black life during the 20th and 21st centuries than either photographer could achieve alone. Their images stand as visual resistance, create an oppositional subculture within the historical framework of black American experience, and confirm that the field of representation (how African Americans see themselves and how others see them) is a site of ongoing struggle.

It can also be said that the study of these images raises many questions. Documentary is frequently perceived as realist, meaning the viewer has assumed that things have happened in front of the camera as they would have happened if the camera had not been there. The expectation of the viewer is important regardless of whether his assumption is true. Developing the conclusion made above, if the photographers were to combine their projects *The Notion Of Family* and *Imperial Courts* in one environment, it would work to their advantage because the viewer would be exposed to information from a personal insider perspective, as well as a more dispassionate outsider perspective and would potentially gain a better understanding of what life is like in these communities. Such a collaboration would also reflect the notion of 'layering in' multiple potential experiences for different viewers in order to engage the most diverse audience possible. As separate projects, however, they sometimes become problematic. The work of Lixenberg embodies an element of 'I speak about them to you' which relates to the outsider gaze, whereas Frazier, as part of the community, 'speaks with them for us'. Thorough analysis of the two projects has created the understanding that the 'observational' and 'participatory' modes are on the one hand distant, and on the other emotional. It is understood that the images are mere fragments of quotidian life and do not show everything, and that

even if they were joined in one project, the whole would remain incomplete. In both cases pre-existing knowledge, or extra information in the form of text of short videos, is necessary if the viewer is to gain a balanced insight into the life of the individuals who make up these communities. While the combination of text and image successfully dispels the notion of any smouldering volcano beneath the images, it is also fair to say that the field of representation remains an ongoing struggle.

Photographers like Lixenberg and Frazier offer a counter black image to prevailing negative stereotypes of African Americans. They do this not simply by reducing black representation to a 'positive' image, but by contributing images which convey the complexity of experience and feeling that characterise these two communities in the hope that they will change, albeit momentarily, the way viewers perceive and relate to African Americans.

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Illustrations

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Fig 2.
LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Self Portrait*, from the series The Notion Of Family, 2003.

Fig 3.
LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Mom and Her Cat Ziggy on American Red Cross Blanket*, from the series The Notion Of Family, 2005.

Fig 4.
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Fig 5.
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Fig 6.
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Fig 7.
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Fig 8.
Dana Lixenberg, *Jennifer, Yasmine, Jasonnae,* from the series Imperial Courts, 2008.

Fig 9.
Dana Lixenberg, *Mercedes, Shawna, Moe,* from the series Imperial Courts, 2011.

Fig 10.
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Fig 14.
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Fig 16.
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Fig 17.
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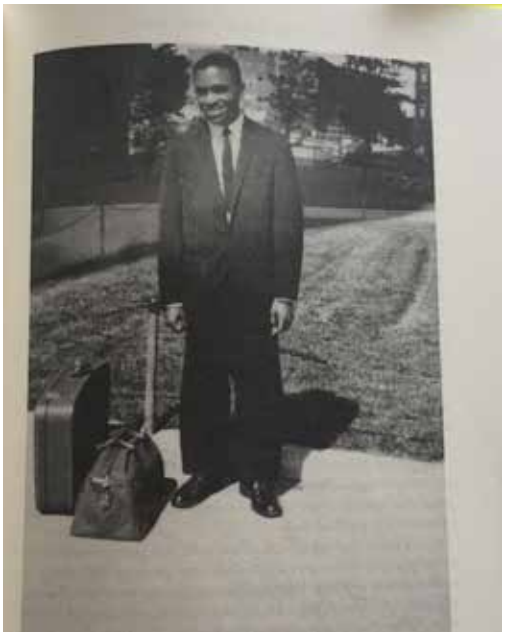

Fig 18.
Egerto Miller,
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Fig 19.
Jack Manning,
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Fig 20.
Carry Mae Weems, *Untitled (Woman and daughter with makeup),* 1990.

Fig 21.
Dana Lixenberg, *Dominos,*
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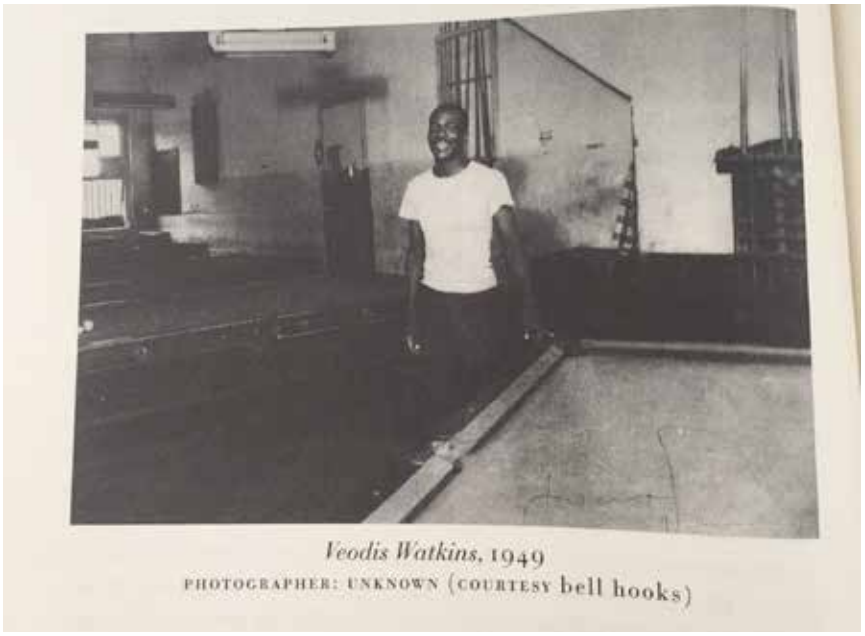

Fig 22.
Photographer unknown, courtesy of Bell Hooks, *Veodis Watkins,* c. 1949.

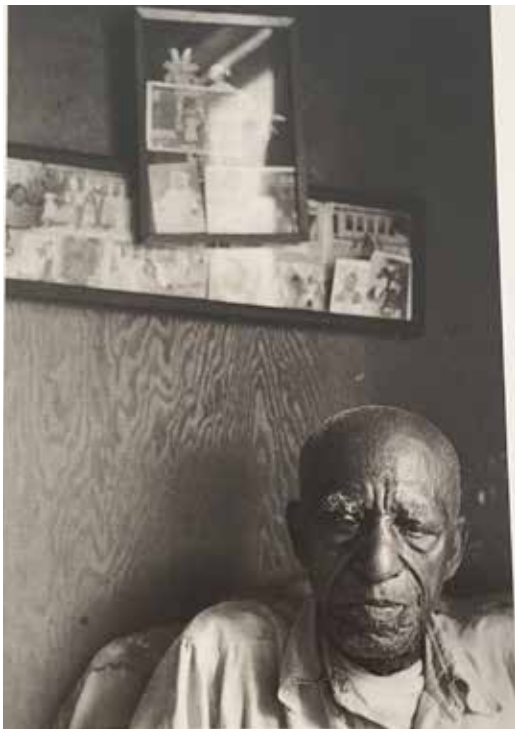

Fig 23.
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Fig 26.
Artist Unknown, *Frederick Douglass*, c. 1848, Courtesy Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

Fig 27.
Steve Grayson, *Untitled*, 1992, Courtesy Getty Images.

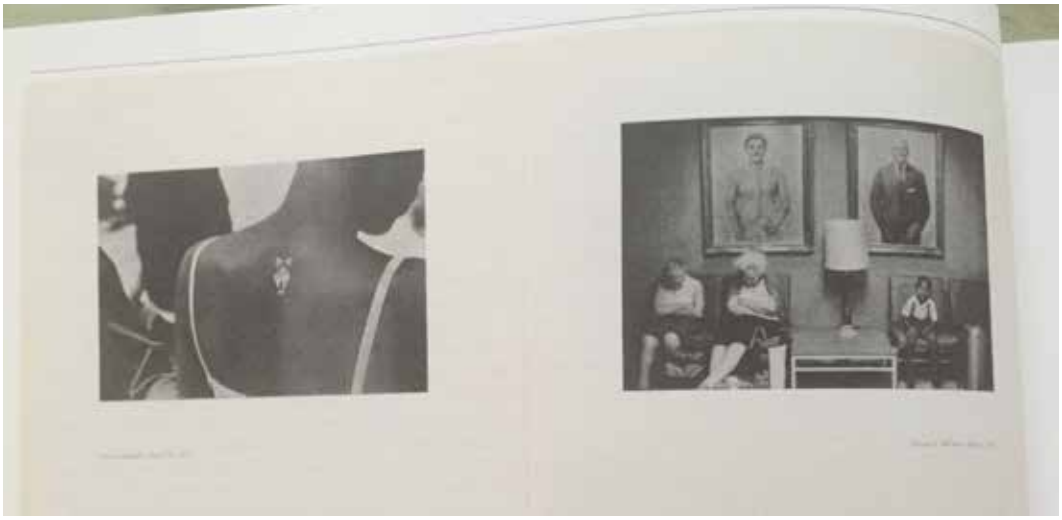

Fig 28.
Spread from *The Black Photographers Annual*, volume 1, 1973.

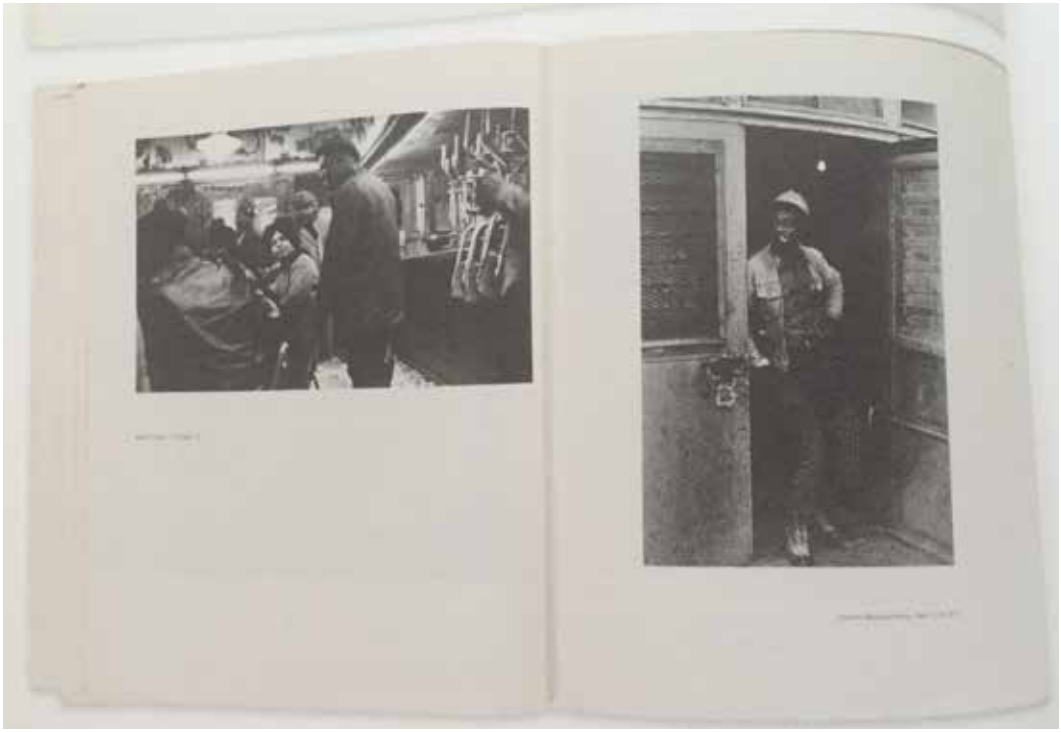

Fig 29.
Spread from *The Black Photographers Annual*, volume 2, 1974.