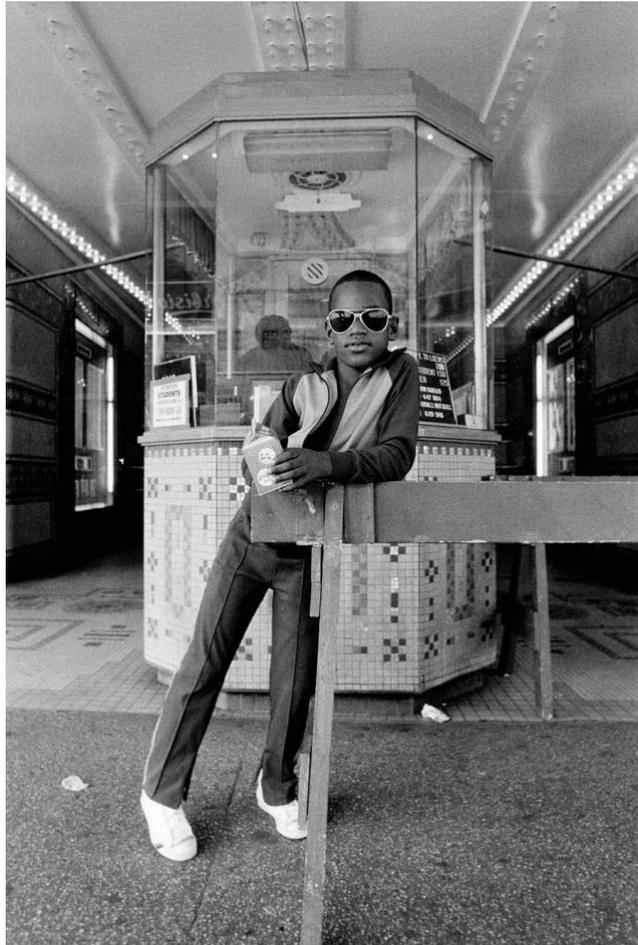


SEANKELLY

Eckardt, Stephanie. "Photographer Dawoud Bey Makes the Past Feel Present." *W Magazine*. May 11, 2021.



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Courtesy of collection of the artist; courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery, New York; Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago; and Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco. © Dawoud Bey

To Dawoud Bey, photography isn't just a *métier* or hobby: It's an act of political responsibility. Perhaps that's because the 68-year-old New Yorker got started in the midst of the civil rights movement of the late 1960s, after inheriting a camera from his grandfather and simply stepping out onto the street. He soon turned the ordinary into the extraordinary: Many of his subjects are waiting for the bus or hanging around after school or church. Like his early influences Roy DeCarava and Gordon Parks, Bey is one of the few photographers who has been able to fully capture Harlem, which was the subject of his first solo show at the Studio Museum four years into his career. Whether elders in their Sunday best uptown or couples embracing in Brooklyn, Bey portrays his subjects with warmth and dignity. What makes them political is simply their existence, presenting Black people as complex human beings. The retrospective "Dawoud Bey: An American Project," on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art through October, is a testament to his photographs' apparent timelessness; while his 2016 series *Harlem Redux* documents the neighborhood's transformations, some photos could very well go back decades.