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We Shall: Photographs by Paul D'Amato

Gregory J. Harris

Paul D'Amato

Cleophus J. Lee

Louise Lincoln

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An abstract painting featuring a white background with various expressive brushstrokes. Large, thick black strokes curve across the composition. Sweeping, layered strokes of light blue and grey are interspersed throughout. Fine, delicate lines in orange and green are scattered across the surface, some forming small, intricate patterns. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and layered complexity.

We
Shall

We
Shall



We Shall

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL D'AMATO

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY
Gregory J. Harris
Pastor Cleophus J. Lee

DEPAUL ART MUSEUM

This book is supported in part by a grant from the David C. & Sarajeon Ruttenberg Arts Foundation and a gift from the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

It is published on the occasion of the exhibition *We Shall: Photographs by Paul D'Amato* at the DePaul Art Museum, Chicago September 12–November 24, 2013

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frontispiece: *Bedroom Door, Cabrini-Green, 2007*

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Acknowledgments

The first work by Paul D'Amato that I encountered was *Library of Religious Books* (pl. 17), an image that continues to astound me with its capacity to record an environment of dilapidation while simultaneously transforming it into a site of radiant light and profound, allusive meaning. The peeling paint echoes the leaves of the scattered books—different material substances somehow reverting to a common form. Because it is so carefully composed, the photograph renders aesthetic what is merely the last stage of the life of a specific, utilitarian space—a school library slated for destruction. It is a short step from the fluttering pages and paint flakes to the library's former patrons: perhaps thousands of students, now dispersed and invisible, who once made use of the space.

Much of D'Amato's work carries a similar charge: his seemingly simple, even

offhanded, images reveal unanticipated layers of meaning, supported by a deep sense of place and the photographer's empathetic eye. After looking at these images, it is practically impossible not to see people and surroundings through a different lens and understand broad issues of race, class, and inequality in more embodied ways. The range of meaning in D'Amato's photographs gives them traction: they are not just aesthetic objects, but also documents, testimonies, historical records—the fruit of social and cultural encounters. These diverse meanings also imbue them with particular interest for a university museum, whose goal is to use objects to stimulate discussion.

Gregory J. Harris, Assistant Curator at the DePaul Art Museum, first proposed this exhibition, and he has nurtured its progress with skill and vision; his essay in this publication situates D'Amato's work and

articulates important issues of both theory and practice. Pastor Cleophus J. Lee also generously contributed text that places the photographs in the context of the communities in which they were made.

Stephen Daiter made several works available for the exhibition and has championed the project since its inception. The staff of Stephen Daiter Gallery—Michael Welch, Paul Berlanga, and Lucas Zenk—assisted with countless logistical aspects of the project. Walker Blackwell and the staff of Latitude facilitated the printing of the photographs for the exhibition. Susan Davidson and Karin Kuzniar Tweedie served as manuscript editor and graphic designer, respectively, for the publication.

We thank the David C. and Sarajeon Ruttenberg Arts Foundation for its generous contribution to the production of this publication, and the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation for providing support for numerous aspects of the exhibition. Olena Marshall in DePaul University's Office of Sponsored Programs and Research deftly coordinated project funding.

We are deeply grateful to Paul D'Amato for his generosity in making these extraordinarily perceptive photographs available for exhibition, and for teaching us new ways to look and see. Finally, our heartfelt thanks goes out to all of the people who collaborated with him and appear in the photographs.

Louise Lincoln, Director
DePaul Art Museum

Introduction

Gregory J. Harris

The Lake Street El tracks cut across the West Side of Chicago, a procession of steel and concrete that spans the breadth of the city from Wabash Avenue downtown to Harlem Avenue on the far edge of Oak Park. Speeding along Lake Street—weaving between the riveted steel supports in a car, or roaring along two stories above the street in a crowded train—the vast diversity and disparities of Chicago fly past you. At thirty miles per hour, you pass glass skyscrapers, trendy restaurants and swanky galleries, meatpacking plants, a new residential community replacing a former public-housing project, clusters of row houses (many boarded up) separated by swaths of empty lots, an active rail yard, and storefront churches that share the block with convenience stores and beauty shops—all before you reach the city’s western border, a mere six miles from the Loop.

Photographer Paul D’Amato had traveled this stretch of the West Side for years before

stopping to take a picture. If you only saw the West Side by car or train, as D’Amato did for so many years, the people who live there, who are mostly African American and tend to be poor, might be easy to miss or ignore—just a blur or a fleeting scene. Yet D’Amato’s experience of passing through these neighborhoods, trying to get from one place to another with as little hindrance as possible, stands in stark contrast to the working process that he adopted. Enamored with the industrial beauty of the El tracks, he initially photographed only these structures (pl. 46), but he was quickly drawn to the people he met along Lake Street and made them his primary focus instead. The El tracks faded into the background of his photographs, becoming the backbone but no longer the focus of a project that has consumed him for nearly a decade.

Since 2004—spurred by questions of race, class, and the dynamics between photo-



Fig. 1. Paul D’Amato. *Diptych: Metropolitan Museum, New York, 1980*

grapher and subject—D’Amato has chronicled dramas large and small in the lives of ordinary people living in some of Chicago’s African American communities on the West Side and in Cabrini-Green. Formally elegant, his piercing portraits explore nuances of character, while his studies of the built environment reveal traces of human life in vivid color and texture. The project *We Shall* documents the lives of these neighborhoods’ residents and the domiciles they inhabit through arresting portraits, selective interior scenes, and studies of the minutiae of everyday life.

D’Amato’s photographs offer a timely account of life in an American city at the beginning of the new millennium, yet they also seem divorced from specific moments in history. Significant events related to race and class punctuate this body of photographs—including the demise of the experiment in public housing (symbolized most prominently by the demolition of the Cabrini-Green high-

riser), and the election of the nation’s first African American president—but little of consequence seems to have changed for the residents of the West Side of Chicago. The disparity between wealth and poverty is at its most severe, though not necessarily its most visible, in this area. D’Amato’s images allude to the ebb and flow of shaky economic times, while relaying stories that rarely make headlines. Indeed, as Alex Kotlowitz wrote:

In the midst of all this, people in these impoverished neighborhoods go about their lives. They hold down jobs. They raise families. They go to school. They play basketball and skip rope. They attend church and get their hair done. They shop and grill and mow their lawns (and the lawns of neighboring vacant lots). They tend their gardens and rake their yards. They gossip and share a beer. In other words, . . . people still are immersed in the routine and banal. They seek some normalcy.¹



Fig. 2. Paul D'Amato. *Girl Reaching for Rose, Boston, 1985*

Neither feel-good narratives nor stories of despair, D'Amato's photographs convey the complexity and ambiguities of everyday life in a community that is both economically and socially marginalized, with few available avenues to make known its presence, its concerns, and its reality.

Chicago's West Side is made up of four neighborhoods: North Lawndale, East and West Garfield Park, and Austin.² Generally speaking, the residents of these neighborhoods are African American and poor or lower middle class.³ African Americans began moving to the West Side in the mid-1940s as part of the Great Migration. North Lawndale, the neighborhood where Martin Luther King Jr. stayed when he visited Chicago in 1966, was a common point of entry for Southern blacks into the city.⁴ By the late 1950s, despite attempts at obstruction by white residents, African Americans had begun to move north and west into

West Garfield Park and eventually Austin, replacing white residents, who left for the nearby suburbs.⁵ The past several decades have not been kind to the West Side. "In the last quarter of the twentieth century," according to sociologist Amanda Seligman, "the black West Side was notorious as one of the worst parts of the city, a living embodiment of the urban crisis . . . the residents were poor, the housing stock and infrastructure decayed, and the streets crime-ridden."⁶ With the exception of a few attempts to redevelop and revitalize certain neighborhoods that were once dominated by public-housing projects, little has improved since 2000.⁷

It is impossible to talk about the West Side of Chicago without discussing public housing. A "well-intentioned" New Deal-era program devised to empty out urban slums, public housing—most notably in Chicago—went awry as a result of poor planning and mismanagement. Early residents in the 1950s and 1960s described public housing as

"paradise,"⁸ but by the 1980s, as D. Bradford Hunt explained, "Chicago's largest public housing projects were dysfunctional. Poor, African American, female-headed families were 'stacked on top of one another,' as residents put it, surrounded by appalling physical neglect, random violence, and social disorder."⁹ Massive high-rise towers, such as those in the Henry Horner Homes and Rockwell Gardens on the West Side and in Cabrini-Green on the Near North Side (where D'Amato expanded his project after a few years), were not integrated into the surrounding communities, which led to unstable environments and the marginalization of their predominantly African American residents. These decaying edifices became looming symbols of the race- and class-based disparity that exists in Chicago. "As icons of inner city poverty," critic and curator Hamza Walker wrote, "these structures reflect race as dependent on if not produced through the structures

of inequality."¹⁰ In other words, black may not always mean poor, but poor, at least in Chicago, all too often means black.

If we agree with Charles Baudelaire's assertion that "a portrait is a model complicated by an artist," the next logical question is whether this can go both ways.¹¹ Can the subject complicate the artist? In D'Amato's case, the answer is yes. He made his first picture on the West Side in 2004 and has been back to photograph the people and their environs every week since. Equally committed to his craft and to immersing himself in the community, D'Amato aspires to narrow the divide between his and his sitters' subjective experiences and lived realities in order to create photographs that are at once genuine and aesthetically engaging. This aspiration also guided much of the work D'Amato has made leading up to the *We Shall* photographs. The photographs included throughout this essay are drawn from several of his previous



Fig. 3. Paul D'Amato. *Bridge Players, Woodfords Club, Portland, 1987*

bodies of work dating back to the 1980s and illustrate the evolution of his working process. Whether photographing men's social clubs in New England (fig. 3) or the Mexican American community in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood (figs. 5, 6, and 10), as he did throughout the 1990s, D'Amato seeks to involve individuals in the process of making photographs, while simultaneously examining the pitfalls that inevitably arise when one attempts to represent another person.

This particular volume, rather than presenting a comprehensive take on D'Amato's work from the West Side, offers insight into the making of the photographs. Like all portraits, D'Amato's photographs are inherently collaborative in nature. They involve a dance, a performance from those on either side of the camera. They do not depict surreptitious "decisive moments"—the passively observed split seconds that were the hallmark of the street photography of a previous era—nor are they the snatch-and-grab cell phone



Fig. 4. Paul D'Amato. *Blue Boy, Portland, 1989*

pictures so common today, the ubiquity and power dynamics of which have made people either skeptical of being represented or highly contrived before the camera.¹² By including multiple versions of a portrait from a single sitting, D'Amato seeks to complicate the images' meaning by offering a challenge to the authority of a single photograph as a comprehensive representation of a person. Each variant not only augments the others, but also potentially contradicts them by examining how slight disparities in pose or expression may reveal the subtle aspects of character. Likewise, these subtle variations plumb the dynamic that unfolds between people as they make a portrait.

D'Amato described the portraitist's challenge: "Most pictures will not honor their subject. Left to their own devices, they will be a sheer, two-dimensional, meager version of them. We're all more interesting than most pictures, but how do you get a picture that feels like it's looking right back



Fig. 5. Paul D'Amato. *Girl with Lingerie Catalogue, Chicago, 1988*

at you?"¹³ Achieving this effect requires time—both the duration needed to make the picture, and an investment of years for the photographer to get to know the sitters and the sitters to get to know him back. D'Amato has visited the neighborhoods he portrays several days each week for a number of years. This is a relatively simple act, but one that is potentially complicated by difference. His work depends on his curiosity and genuine interest in other people, on his willingness to approach and talk with those he does not know in places where he supposedly does not belong. He is not a resident of the West Side, so a substantial portion of what he does as a photographer is engage with people, regardless of their perceived differences, in order to understand how they experience the world.

Though the notion that we live in a post-racial society is frequently voiced, many of our social policies and practices suggest otherwise. "Transcending race," wrote Walker, "has proven a somewhat paradoxical task,



Fig. 6. Paul D'Amato. *Girl in Shopping Cart, Chicago, 1989*

one fraught with contention as our efforts to become less race conscious serve to make us more race conscious."¹⁴ Yet D'Amato's photographs demonstrate that this heightened awareness need not be an impediment to creating a genuine connection with others. "I know these tensions exist," D'Amato said, "but I do believe we are part of a greater whole and I think if you believe that, the most radical thing you can do is act like it."¹⁵ With this in mind, each of D'Amato's portraits suggests its subject's connection to a broader community without losing sight of the individual's integrity.

The past decade has seen a resurgence of photographic work of a documentary nature. After a period in which the dominant trend was for photographers to turn to their own domestic experience for subject matter—as seen in the work of Nan Goldin, Sally Mann, and Larry Sultan from the 1980s and 1990s—photographers are now increasingly looking

outward in order to make pictures about lives other than their own. This outward perspective, combined with an interest in subject matter that might appear rather ordinary and unremarkable, attempts to give some clarity to the here and now, while addressing topics outside the photographer's autobiographical narrative.

The criticisms of photography leveled by postmodern luminaries such as Susan Sontag and Martha Rosler—that overexposure to “images of horror” creates indifference or that “concerned” photography only reinforces the privileged place of the viewer—prompted a degree of solipsism that steered discussions away from what photographs might actually show, to debates about a photographer's right to depict the wider world and the people who inhabit it.¹⁶ Out of fear that their work would be labeled “victim photography” or accused of “exoticism, tourism, voyeurism,” a generation of photographers made insightful and powerful work yet tended to tackle

only issues of personal or autobiographical significance.¹⁷ While an understanding of how people are represented in photographs is crucial to the medium's relevance, making pictures of those outside one's intimate circle became all but taboo during the 1980s and 1990s. Though important to the development of contemporary photographic practice, such debates skirted many of the pressing social and political issues raised by documentary work. Photographers resorted to strategies that were hyper-self-conscious or contrived, preventing them from looking outward as a means of contributing to the ongoing discourse on representation, class, and race.

Photographers like D'Amato, who work in a documentary mode, grapple with issues that are at the heart of photography: the limitations of the medium to convey a narrative or express a definitive fact. How does a photographer reconcile the opposing truths that every photograph is at once a fabrication and also a representation



Fig. 7. Paul D'Amato. *Fog Kiss*, 1993

of someone or something that does in fact inhabit the real world? Photographs, particularly those of a documentary nature, have long had a somewhat unusual place within the realm of fine art.¹⁸ More than simply a high degree of verisimilitude, photographs possess a distinct connection to the things they depict. Significantly, this indexical relationship to their subject sets them apart from other forms of representation in that they are perceived as furnishing some kind of evidentiary truth. D'Amato's work embraces the notion of the photograph as an index, while challenging its ability to function as evidence of anything concrete.¹⁹ Instead, his photographs exist as a record of an encounter or exchange of something genuine before the camera and allow for a degree of translation and interpretation. This approach to making photographs, as David Chandler elaborated, “remains governed by the primary authority of the photographic exposure aimed directly at the world. It adheres to the belief

in the camera to summon an existential reality, and, although highly subjective, a form of authenticity.”²⁰

The perception of documentary put forward in the 1930s by opposing British and Soviet ideologies persists in ways to this day. From the British perspective, documentary is seen as a means to inform and educate people about their civic duties; the Soviet conception of the genre is that documentary images can be used to manipulate and enact social or political change.²¹ With both strains in mind, Okwui Enwezor encouraged a less rigid and pedantic approach to the relationship between documentary images and truth: “To document is never to make immanent a singular overwhelming truth. It is simply to collect in different forms a series of statements . . . leading to the interpretation of historical events or facts.”²² Such a description of documentary work allows for the photographer's point of view, but does not privilege it as an infallible (or devious) authority.



Fig. 8. Paul D'Amato. *Mardi Gras, New Orleans, 1995*

The documentary genre—particularly of art—is somewhat challenging to define. Critic Michael Chanan proposed a useful starting point: documentary is distinct from fiction in how it addresses the audience. While fiction approaches the viewer as a “private individual,” speaking to an “interior life of feelings, sentiments and secret desires,” documentary appeals to the viewer as a “citizen” who is a “participant in the public sphere.”²³ Arguably, contemporary documentary photographers, like the best nonfiction writers, draw from both ends of this spectrum and “[stretch] the artistic dimension of reportage.”²⁴ Such an understanding of documentary photography—particularly D'Amato's—might place it in the same camp as literary nonfiction. It deals in things drawn from the real world, but allows the work to be evocative, though not necessarily narrative, embracing what Robert S. Boynton claims as the common goals of art and reportage: “subjectivity, honesty, empathy.”²⁵

Today there are several accomplished photographers working in a documentary mode who aim to take the pulse of contemporary American society while paying particular attention to race and class. In contrast to D'Amato's concentration on a few square miles of a single city, Zoe Strauss and Paul Graham do not devote themselves to a fixed geographic region. Although Strauss often focuses on the neighborhood where she lives, a working-class section of South Philadelphia, she routinely travels around the country in search of subjects. A crucial component of Strauss's practice is the public presentation of her work. From 2001 to 2010, she held ad-hoc exhibitions of her photographs beneath Interstate 95 (which runs adjacent to, and over, the neighborhoods of many of the people who appear in her photographs) thereby making her work accessible to her subjects. As with D'Amato's work, portraits and details of urban decay populate Strauss's oeuvre. She generally

prefers a brief but intense meeting with her subjects to a long-term relationship.²⁶ Both D'Amato and Strauss employ distinct compositional vocabularies as a way to suggest authenticity and a collaborative tone of authorship in their photographs. Where D'Amato's approach is reserved and formally direct, Strauss's photographs, made with a small-format camera, are casually composed, giving her work a quality that is raw and confrontational. This heightens their emotional impact, though the people she portrays seem to reveal the hypocrisy of the American dream.

Graham, by contrast, takes a step back from his subjects and approaches the issue of disenfranchisement somewhat more obliquely. Making frequent road trips, he scours the edges of cities for uncelebrated but poetic moments that could offer insight into the American character. Graham takes on topics such as privilege and disconnection using an array of visual and conceptual

devices to explore metaphors of visibility and invisibility. In the series *American Night*, he drastically overexposes his film, reducing figures to barely visible forms. In *a shimmer of possibility*, he intercuts consecutive images of mundane situations in a complex sequence—for example, a man cutting grass in a light rain or a couple walking home from the grocery store. These tactics place narratives, however vague, at the center of Graham's projects. The characters in these narratives remain entirely anonymous and, even more so than Strauss's subjects, stand in for facets of the American social landscape. Ultimately, what links D'Amato, Strauss, and Graham is a desire to record and engage with contemporary society without being explicitly didactic or succumbing to cynicism.

D'Amato records the built environment that his subjects inhabit by foregrounding details. The telltale signs of decay and neglect—peeling paint and broken concrete—figure



Fig. 9. Paul D'Amato. *Milan Train Station, Italy, 1998*

prominently in a few images, but his most lyrical photographs of infrastructure strip away all architectural context. Made primarily in Cabrini-Green, these images record the marks left by residents on the walls of their homes. Like photographers Helen Levitt and Aaron Siskind, D'Amato enters into an after-the-fact collaboration with the anonymous mark-makers of the deserted homes he photographs. His photographic reframing of the paintings draws their formal complexity into a dialogue with Abstract Expressionism (pl. 41). Yet his own concerns lie more in unearthing the traces of human presence, as these paintings were intended as confessions made in the privacy of the home and revealed only once that home had been abandoned, likely with reluctance.

In 2000 the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), the organization charged with administering the city's public-housing program, released its optimistically titled "Plan for Transformation." Ostensibly, this plan

was meant to combat the dysfunction, decay, and crime that had overtaken the housing projects; at the same time, it made what had become valuable real estate available for redevelopment. The plan called for nearly all of the high-rise towers to be demolished (a process that got underway in earnest around the time D'Amato began photographing on the West Side) and replaced with a different, but no less idealized and socially engineered, vision of an urban community.²⁷ As the buildings were razed and replaced with new "mixed-income" town homes and low-rise developments (with very few units set aside for former public-housing residents), the residents of the high-rises were dispersed throughout the city, many "haphazardly"²⁸ to the West Side, where their housing vouchers were readily accepted by landlords.²⁹ This process of displacement and relocation, and the disruption it has created in peoples' lives, though not explicitly referenced, is an important subtext in D'Amato's photographs.

After photographing on the West Side for a few years, D'Amato was taken to Cabrini-Green, a collection of immense concrete public-housing towers that loomed along Division Street on Chicago's Near North Side, by April (pl. 20), a woman he had photographed several times. When he arrived, the towers had just been slated for demolition. Cabrini-Green's connection to the West Side was natural, and D'Amato quickly incorporated the community into his project. Many of the people he met on the West Side had family and friends in Cabrini-Green, and as the towers were being torn down, many of their residents would be relocated to the West Side.

The physical architecture of public housing in Chicago has been a rich source for photographers to allude to larger narratives. Thomas Struth's images, made some fifteen years earlier, of the South Lake Street Apartments (structures similar to those in Cabrini-Green) possess a cold and omniscient

remove that emphasizes the architecture's role in creating an alienating power structure. In contrast, D'Amato's photograph of the demolition of one of the towers at 634 West Division Street is particularly poignant and captures the remnants of a very human presence (pl. 5). The Chicago skyline fills the background, while in the foreground the outer wall of the building has been ripped away to reveal the vibrant colors and handmade patterns that softened the harsh cinderblock structure and made it a home. As vernacular paintings, they are more than simple decorations of a cold, blank space. They are visceral expressions of emotion, declarations of their makers' existence. The camera's precision contrasts with the improvised quality of the handmade marks, but it also accentuates their raw emotion, revealing the sheer authenticity to which all photographs aspire. Resonant and visually complex, the image evokes layered stories of community, dislocation, and social and political idealism gone awry.

Communicating even a fraction of a person's character is one of photography's most vexing challenges. When making a portrait, the responsibility a photographer owes his or her sitter is great whether they are intimates, acquaintances, or strangers. D'Amato's strategy for bridging any gap that may exist between himself and those he photographs is, as he says:

Just to spend a ridiculous amount of time there. You get past being enamored with difference. You try to get to the point where you're photographing from the inside out instead of the outside in. You try to get to a place where you lose all definition of where the edges are and that just takes time.³⁰

Amazingly, it works. More often than not, the people he approaches are eager to work with him on a portrait. D'Amato's demeanor is disarming. He is persistent yet gregarious, with a quick wit that puts people at ease. He speaks with the remnants of a Boston

accent, a brogue that is charming for its unfamiliarity in Chicago. D'Amato photographs people in spaces public and private: the sidewalk, parking lots, living rooms and bedrooms, and church sanctuaries. His process is fluid and allows for the individual encounter to unfold before the camera. Setting up his cumbersome tripod-mounted view camera allows time for the initial ice to break and for a conversation to begin. Beyond the photographic process, D'Amato's portraits are built on relationships that develop slowly, as he spends time in the community, shares his pictures, makes new ones, and simply pays attention.

This interest and respect seems to be reciprocated by D'Amato's subjects. His portraits are riveting. The exchange of gazes that occurs between sitter and photographer—each giving the other the same degree of scrutiny—is embedded in the photograph's emotional tenor. Sometimes a great deal of ease is apparent, as in the portrait *Too Tall*



Fig. 10. Paul D'Amato. *Junior and Janessa, Chicago, 2000*

(pl. 4); D'Amato photographed the subject numerous times over the course of several years on the grounds of the now-demolished Henry Horner Homes. Similarly, in the portrait *Darrielle and Dasia* (pl. 39), there is evidence that D'Amato developed a relationship and rapport with his sitters. Taken alone, Darrielle's stoic stare might seem hardened. The context of the portrait betrays this: an unmade bed, a little sister's adoring gaze, and one of D'Amato's early portraits pinned to the wall.

In other portraits, there seems to be a degree of underlying unease. In one of D'Amato's most dynamic images, a woman, named Shavondra, (pl. 3) stands before a chain-link fence wearing a thick plaid jacket and knit cap pulled down over her ears. Her arms are folded as she clutches her torso, head turned, burying her chin in her shoulder; she looks into the camera with equal parts trepidation and defiance. This quality is far from a weakness in D'Amato's work. It imbues his photographs with a sense of drama and

sincerity that is unusual in a time when so much visual culture is marked by irony. His images are not meant to be comforting, and he makes no attempt to mask their potentially unsettling qualities. Where critics of photography have argued that images of the disenfranchised serve only to reassure viewers of their safe and privileged position of viewing,³¹ D'Amato's portraits at times exhibit a palpable tension between subject and photographer—and, by extension, viewer. In this way, his approach challenges us to actively consider our own position and how we do or do not relate to the person looking back through the photograph.

One might get the sense from D'Amato's individual portraits that the West Side is populated by loners, disconnected in the midst of an unwelcoming environment. While his portraits of individual figures privilege their solitary character, his group portraits evince a strong sense of social solidarity. Often made in churches, these photographs

depict choirs, men's groups, Sunday school classes, and huddled women dressed in their finest. Affection and pride come through in a gentle touch or fulfilled smile. Collectively, D'Amato's portraits, of both individuals and groups, allude to a larger whole and depict the emotional bonds—not readily visible from the outside—that cohere the communities of the West Side.

Earlier depictions of black Chicagoans, such as those made by Russell Lee and Edwin Rosskam, who recorded the Great Migration in the 1940s under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration, showed African Americans “dwarfed by their surroundings,” beleaguered and overcome by the challenges they faced in an urban environment.³² By contrast, D'Amato's subjects dominate the frame and often gaze directly into the camera. His exacting compositions are direct, even austere, and reiterate many of the conventions of Romantic-era portraiture as studies of individual gravitas (the paintings of Goya and Corot are important touch points for D'Amato). Echoing an aspiration as old as the daguerreotype, Susie Linfield noted, “The best photographic portraits, like the painted portraits, present us not with biographical information but with a soul.”³³ D'Amato portrays his subjects' own solidity, suggesting that they are not incidental, nor are they overwhelmed by their surroundings. Their locations are often worn and in disrepair,

bearing the marks of a complex social and political history. Yet because he is not interested in sensationalism, D'Amato does not focus on overt signs of crime or violence. His vivid large-scale prints imbue his photographs with a heightened sense of immediacy, as their subjects assume an imposing presence. It is this formal dexterity and D'Amato's attentiveness to individuals and the nuances of their character that prevent his photographs from succumbing to sentimentality and sacrificing their social conscience.

D'Amato's photographs ask much of their viewers. Though formally rigorous and rich in detail, they refuse to provide all of the answers and instead embrace an ambiguity that allows us to experience things we may not fully understand. While they privilege the significance of individuals as more than symbols of race and class, these photographs offer little in the way of tangible facts. Chicago's West Side, like so many neighborhoods, is a complex and challenging place, and it would be foolish to think that we could fully grasp the lives of the people looking back at us through a photograph. Photography often does its best work when dealing in subtleties. Ultimately, D'Amato's photographs offer us a glimmer of insight into life as it is lived, day in and day out. They require us to bring our own social imagination to bear on the issues they raise, the stories they tell, and the emotions they elicit.

1. Alex Kotlowitz, “Youth Violence in Chicago,” *Time Out Chicago*, Feb. 14, 2013, <http://timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/16052236/youth-violence-in-chicago?page=0,0>.
2. Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2.
3. According to a story by Patrick Smith, a reporter for WBEZ Chicago, who looked at a small slice of West Garfield Park, the median household income in the neighborhood in 2011 was \$22,833, while approximately one-third of the households in the area had an annual income of less than \$10,000. See Patrick Smith, “A Chicago Teen's Murder Goes Largely Untold,” WBEZ 91.5, Feb. 14, 2013, <http://www.wbez.org/news/chicago-teens-murder-goes-largely-untold-105510>.
4. King famously remarked that he had “never seen something so hostile and so hateful” in the South as the treatment that blacks received at the hands of whites in Chicago. See Frank James, “Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago,” *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 5, 1966, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/politics/chi-chicagodays-martinlutherking-story,0,4515753.story>.
5. Seligman, *Block by Block*, 2–3.
6. *Ibid.*, 3.
7. For a more detailed analysis of life on Chicago's West Side, particularly the effects of changes in public-housing policy, see Larry Bennett, *Third City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
8. D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1.
9. *Ibid.*, 5.
10. Hamza Walker, “Domino Effect,” *Black Is, Black Ain't*, Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, <http://www.renaissancesociety.org/site/Exhibitions/Essay.Black-Is-Black-Ain-t.595.html> (accessed May 8, 2013).
11. Charles Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1846,” in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P. E. Charvet (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), 78.
12. Robert Frank, whose highly influential book *The Americans* was published in 1959, once remarked, “What I liked about photography was precisely this: that I could walk away and I could be silent and it was done very quickly and there was no direct involvement.” See Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001), 352.
13. Paul D'Amato, interview with the author, Jan. 25, 2012.
14. Hamza Walker, “Domino Effect.”
15. Paul D'Amato, interview with the author, Jan. 25, 2012.
16. See Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977) and Martha Rosler, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography),” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).
17. *Ibid.* 308.
18. Walker Evans famously declared in 1971, “The term should be *documentary* style.... You see, a document has use, whereas art is really useless. Therefore art is never a document, though it certainly can adopt that style.” See Leslie Katz, “An Interview with Walker Evans,” in *Photography in Print*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 365.
19. The slippage between photographs and any kind of definitive truth has interested D'Amato since his earliest years as a photographer. As an undergraduate at Reed College in the early 1980s, he made a series of diptychs in which he printed two consecutive photographs alongside one another, asserting that one ultimately undermined the singular authority of the other. See fig. 1
20. David Chandler, “A Thing There Was That Mattered,” in *Paul Graham* (Göttingen: SteidlMACK, 2009), 40.
21. Mark Nash, “Experiments with Truth: The Documentary Turn,” in *Experiments with Truth*, ed. Mark Nash (Philadelphia: Fabric Workshop and Museum, 2004), 15.
22. Okwui Enwezor, “Documenta 11, Documentary, and ‘The Reality Effect,’” in *Experiments with Truth*, ed. Mark Nash (Philadelphia: Fabric Workshop and Museum, 2004), 99.
23. Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), vi.
24. Robert S. Boynton, ed., *The New New Journalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), xvi. This argument echoes a claim made by Beaumont Newhall, who paraphrased Walt Whitman, in one of the earliest attempts to write a comprehensive history of photography: “Documentary is . . . an approach which makes use of the artistic faculties to give ‘vivification to fact.’” See Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography*, 4th ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 144.
25. Boynton, *The New New Journalism*, xvi.
26. Peter Barberie, “Zoe Strauss: Under 1-95,” in *Zoe Strauss: 10 Years*, ed. Peter Barberie (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2012), 131.
27. Bennett, *Third City*, 14.
28. Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 13. Hunt explained further that since thousands of families had to be moved quickly to accommodate the redevelopment schedule, “relocation counselors loaded tenants into vans and drove to neighborhoods where they knew they would find a supply of landlords willing to accept the [CHA housing] vouchers—mainly in some of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. . . . While vouchers sometimes allowed former public housing residents to improve their physical housing conditions, they more often redistributed than deconcentrated poverty.” See Hunt, 281.
29. *Ibid.*, 282. Hunt observed that there has been increasing instability and social disorder in neighborhoods like those on the West Side with a high number of voucher recipients.
30. Paul D'Amato, interview with the author, Jan. 25, 2012.
31. See Rosler, “In, Around,” 306.
32. Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 214.
33. Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 40.

Can These Bones Live?

Pastor Cleophus J. Lee
Original Providence Baptist Church

Vacant lots . . . Dilapidated buildings . . . Schools that lack the resources to properly educate the students who scream up and down their halls . . . Businesses that don't belong to or benefit the people who reside in the community . . . Crime and Violence . . . A generation that is more concerned with making a dollar than they are with filling their heads with knowledge. WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON? See, there are families that really are not families. Boys left to teach themselves how to be men . . . No leadership, no guidance, no discipline . . . As a result of that lack of family the gang members become his brothers, and they teach him everything he knows . . . Girls left to fend for themselves searching for love in all the wrong places. Doing what she has to do in order to make it . . . WAIT!!! Now she has an extra mouth to feed. But she can barely feed herself . . .

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON? I once heard God having a conversation with a man by the name of Ezekiel. See, Ezekiel was enlisted in the service of God to do His bidding. While having this conversation, Ezekiel found himself in the middle of a valley filled with dead men's bones . . . DRY BONES . . . They were very dry. Dry because they had been dead a very long time. See, this was no recent disaster but the product of a long process of death and decay. And the valley was full of these bones. It was a total disaster zone . . . Not merely touching one or two people, but an entire nation . . . See, 400 years of slavery can annihilate any nation . . . The loss of language . . . The loss of culture . . . The loss of identity . . . Who are we again? Does anyone really know? The valley is filled with dead men's bones . . . DRY BONES . . . A nation decimated . . . But there is hope. See, if you keep listening to the conversation

between God and Ezekiel, you'll hear God ask him a very interesting question. Now I must admit it sounds funny that God who is all-knowing . . . God who is everywhere . . . God who has no weakness . . . God who is in control of all things would ask Ezekiel a question as if He didn't already know the answer. But God asks anyway. As Ezekiel walks back and forth surveying the condition of this once great and mighty people, God asks him the question "Can these bones live?" . . . WHAT A CRITICAL QUESTION . . . Here is Ezekiel, who's standing in the midst of a situation that appears to be hopeless and impossible to change, and the all-knowing, all-powerful, almighty God asks, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel does not know what to say and simply says, "O Sovereign Lord, You alone know." He knew that if the bones could live it was a matter only God knew and that the giving of life was a deed only

God could perform. God then directed Ezekiel to "prophesy to these bones." God was telling Ezekiel that this people are in need of my Word . . . My Word will give them life . . . My Word will give them hope . . . My Word will give them vision and purpose.

See, the valley of dry bones speaks of the spiritual condition of our community. Do we see our people as God does? God caused Ezekiel to walk back and forth among the dry bones . . . Understand, we do this every day in the stores and on the streets of our communities. Do we see? Do we feel the situation? Jesus did, and he wept over Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul did, and his heart's desire and prayer for his community was that they should be saved . . . As we look around, let us ask ourselves, "Can these bones live?" Let us not forget we are all one people. When one suffers, we all do.

Shall We

Paul D'Amato

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body.”

1 Corinthians 12:12

It takes both imagination and a sense of playfulness to say yes when a stranger approaches and says, “You look great and I’d love to take your picture.” After all, it is far easier—less risky—to say no. At the very least, it is inconvenient to agree to the request, especially when the photographer uses a large camera and needs time to make an image. Yet all of my pictures are a consequence of that simple yes and the suspension of distrust that it implies.

What occurs then in my work is a kind of collaboration and performance on both sides of the camera. My subjects and I come

to an accord on what will lead to the most emotionally resonant and believable picture. Most receive copies of their pictures, and we form relationships that allow us to try again, often as many as a dozen times over a period of years. My subjects perform enactments of themselves which I shape into photographs. We do this because it is a pleasure to make pictures, to play at image-making and create something that would not otherwise exist.

It is important to keep in mind that the photograph and the person in the photograph are not the same. My subjects move, talk, and respond to one another; their appearance is constantly changing. As a result, my images do not represent the West Side, or a particular class, race, or even time. All of that has an existence that is independent of the work and beyond the scope of photography. In the end, the work is about establishing and playing with a sequence of relationships: between

me and my subjects, between the formal elements in the pictures, between one image and another, and between the viewer and the photograph.

For their profound generosity, I want to thank all the people who played along and lent their appearances to my pictures. In return, I have tried to honor our interactions with pictures that show that each of my subjects is as important as any who have appeared in art. I want to thank a few of my subjects in particular; their yeses were turning points in my work: Tashma; Lamont; Sonny Roosevelt; Maybell Hawkins and her whole family (particularly Doreka and her brother, Darielle); April; Pastor Snirly Simpson and Mount Ridge Baptist Church; and Pastor

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We Shall





2. *Shavondra*, 2005



3. *Shavondra*, 2005





5. *634 West Division Street,
Cabrini-Green, 2006*



6. *Girl with Laundry*, 2004



7. Margaret and Marquetta Tisdell, *Original Providence Baptist Church*, 2013





9. *Tim*, 2006



10. *Lillian*, 2011



11. *Lillian*, 2011



12. *Lillian*, 2011



13. *Tim*, 2006



14. *Tim*, 2006



15. *Boy by Pool*, 2005





17. *Library of Religious Books*, 2008



18. *Broken Blinds*, 2008



19. *Haircut*, 2007





21. *Chess Player*, 2013



22. *Blue Shawl, Revival Tent*, 2004

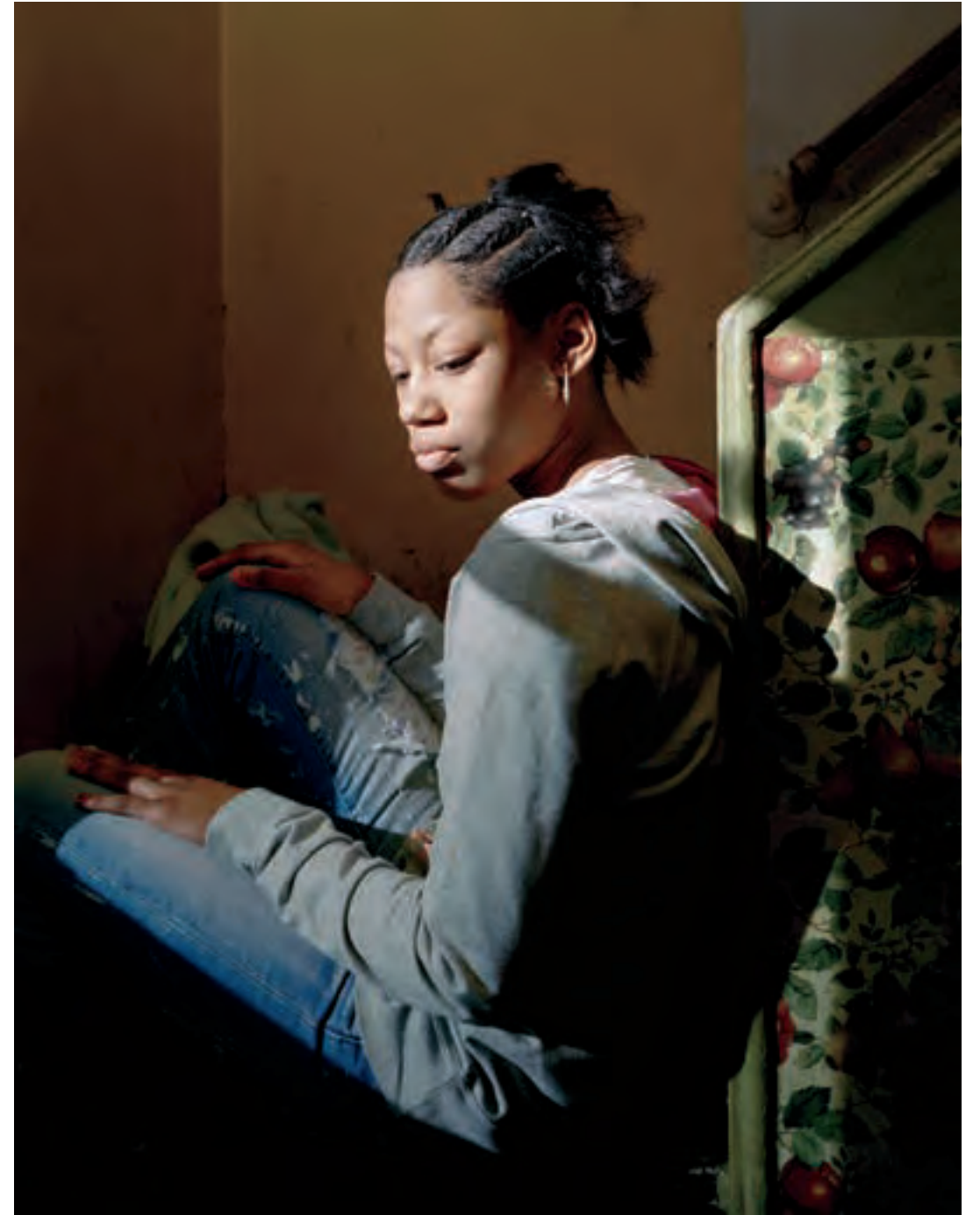


23. *Pastor Cleophus J. Lee, Original Providence Baptist Church, 2013*





25. *Tashma*, 2008



26. *Tashma*, 2008



27. Tashma, 2009



28. Tashma, 2007





30. *We Shall*, 2009 (left)
31. *CJ*, 2004 (right)



32. Red Sunday, New Mount Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church, 2005







35. *Mike and Doug*, 2010



36. *Mike and Doug*, 2010













42. *Red Curtain*, 2010



43. *Red Curtain*, 2010







46. Lake Street, 2011



CONTRIBUTORS

Paul D'Amato holds an MFA in photography from Yale (1985). He received fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation in 1994 and 2004, and his work is held in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He is a professor of photography at Columbia College Chicago.

Gregory J. Harris is the Assistant Curator at the DePaul Art Museum in Chicago. He is a specialist in the history of photography and curated the exhibitions *Of National Interest* (2008) and *In the Vernacular* (2010) at the Art Institute of Chicago and *Studio Malick: Portraits from Mali* (2012) at the DePaul Art Museum.

Cleophus J. Lee has served as the Pastor of the Original Providence Baptist Church in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago since 2009. He is completing graduate studies at Liberty University Theological Seminary.

STAFF OF THE DEPAUL ART MUSEUM

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