



A Time Before Crack

By Jamel Shabazz, Claude Grunitsky, James Koe Rodriguez, Charlie Ahearn, Terrence Jennings

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“Deeply unpretentious and undistracted by the trendy new aesthetics or technologies, Mr. Shabazz is the best kind of photojournalist: one driven simply by curiosity about other human beings.”

—Ken Johnson, *The New York Times*

Once upon a time before crack, inner city communities were blighted by poverty and unemployment—but not by the drug wars that tore families apart, destroying lives with needless violence and mindless addiction. Once upon a time before crack, pride and style were as inseparable as a beatbox and mixtape, or as a pair of shoes and matching purse. Once upon a time before crack, Jamel Shabazz was on the scene, working the streets of New York City, capturing the faces and places of an era that have long since disappeared.

Best known as Hip Hop’s finest fashion photographer for his blockbuster best-selling monograph, *Back in the Days* (powerHouse Books, 2001), Shabazz revisited his archive and unearthed an extraordinary collection of never-before-published documentary photographs collected for his third powerHouse Books release, *A Time Before Crack*, a visual diary of the streets of New York City from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties, Shabazz’s distinctive photographs reveal the families, the poses, and the players who made this age extraordinary.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Following up on his powerHouse titles *Back in the Days* (2001) and *Last Sunday in June* (2003), Shabazz delivers another set of photographs taken of nascent hip-culture circa 1979-1985. Nearly all of the 150 photos here are individual or group portraits; most are of young people in the streets; all reflect Shabazz's extraordinary rapport with his subjects—even when the latter are striking a defiant pose. The book offers a panorama of New York's African-American style of the era: Puma-hatted men with over-sized glasses, women in tight denim with white stitching, kente-clothed women, giant boom boxes, light brown glossy leather and painted denim jackets, big gold chains and earrings, tiny shorts—and even a kind of Izod-Lacosted formality that pervaded the scene before the absolute dominance of athletic wear. As far as the title's implication of a more innocent time goes: it's indeed impossible to anticipate the coming effects of crack on New York from looking at these pictures, and ways in which Shabazz's subjects face the camera does feel less mediated than what he might get now walking down the street in Bed-Stuy, making this book a multi-layered time capsule. Also included are essays by *Wild Style* director Charlie Ahearn and photographer Terrence Jennings, an introduction by TRACE magazine editor-in-chief Claude Grunitzky and an afterword by artist James "Koe" Rodriguez.

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About the Author

Jamel Shabazz is the author of *Back in the Days* (powerHouse Books, 2001) and *The Last Sunday in June* (powerHouse Books, 2003). His photographs have appeared in publications including *The Source*, *Vibe*, *TRACE*, *Flaunt*, *Mass Appeal*, *Jalouse*, *Black Book*, *OneWorld*, and *Honey*. Shabazz's work has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Kravets/Wehby Gallery, New York; by Kangol at the Dazed & Confused Gallery, London; by adidas and Lodown at adidas Originals, Berlin; and in Trace's True Signs, Paris. His debut book, *Back in the Days*, has received astounding critical acclaim and commercial success since its initial release in January 2001. Shabazz was born in Brooklyn and lives in Long Island, New York.

Claude Grunitzky is chairman and Editor-in-Chief of *TRACE magazine* and chairman of *TRUE Agency*, a specialized advertising and marketing shop partnered with Omnicom's *TBWACHiatDay*.

James "Koe" Rodriguez is an artist, writer, and faithful hip-hopper. His latest project is a documentary film on legendary New York photographers Ernie Paniccioli, Jamel Shabazz, and Joe Conzo titled *I LOVE*.

Charlie Ahearn is the director of the classic, 1982 Hip Hop movie *Wild Style*. He is the coauthor of *Yes Yes Y'all* (Da Capo, 2002) and currently hosts an eponymously named Internet radio show on *wps1.org*.

Terrence Jennings' photographs have been published in *TRACE*, *The Source*, *The New York Times*, *The Observer of London*, and *Black: A Celebration of a Culture* (Hylas, 2004).

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