Black Matrilineage, Photography, and Representation

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Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one’s status in society, “the mule of the world,” because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else—everyone else—refused to carry. We have also been called “Matriarchs,” “Superwomen,” and “Mean and Evil Bitches.” Not to mention “Castraters” and “Sapphire’s Mama.” When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted; when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty inspirational appellations, then stuck in the farthest corner. When we have asked for love, we have been given children. In short, even our plainer gifts, our labors of fidelity and love, have been knocked down our throats. To be an artist and a black woman, even today, lowers our status in many respects, rather than raises it and yet, artists we will be. Therefore, we must fearlessly pull out of ourselves and look at and identify with our lives the living creativity some of our great-grandmothers were not allowed to know. I stress some of them because it is well known that the majority of our great-grandmothers knew, even without “knowing” it, the reality of their spirituality, even if they didn’t recognize it beyond what happened in the singing at church—and they never had any intention of giving it up.1
— Alice Walker

A young Black female photographer sits in class at the Philadelphia College of Art in the mid-1970s. During class and in front of a room full of students, her male professor tells her that she is “out of place and out of order as a woman.” He continues by telling her that all she could and would do is “have a baby when a good man could have had her seat.” The woman is “shocked into silence”2 but remains undeterred and continues to make photographs.

Roughly twenty years later, a Jamaican-born, Black female photographer participates in the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study
Program. She is the first pregnant artist to do so. She tells people in her program that she is pregnant and was met with a response of “Oh my God, are you sure? What are you going to do?” She is outraged and knows that motherhood would not end her career.3

Less than ten years ago, a mother, a Black female photographer whose work includes documenting her family, enrolled in an M.F.A. program at a prestigious New York photography institution. A younger white woman who is also enrolled in the program, shares that her (the photographer’s) presence is “devaluing the degree.”4

Proclamations of Black Motherhood

The stories described above happened to Dr. Deborah Willis, artist Renee Cox, and photographer Nona Faustine, respectively. In 2009, Dr. Deborah Willis revisited images she made of her pregnant body in the 1970s and created the triptych I Made Space for a Good Man, 2009. The text left to right reads “A woman taking space from a good man” / “You took space from a good man.” / “I made space for a good man.” In this work, she gazes squarely at the camera in a manner that forces the viewer to reckon with her body and presence in a manner that cannot be ignored.

For over thirty-five years, Dr. Willis has been a leading photography historian, authoring dozens of books focused on the intersection of history, race,
and gender photography. Her many awards include a MacArthur Fellowship, a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow, and a Richard D. Cohen Fellow in African and African American Art at Harvard University’s Hutchins Center. Her legacy of mentoring and uplifting Black women photographers has been monumental in shaping and shifting the historical, present, and future visual landscape.

Through visual representations of people from the African Diaspora, particularly Black women and mothers, artist Renee Cox reveals a new way of seeing our past, present, and potential future by positioning Black women as Afro-centric superheroes rich with sexual agency and power. From 1993-1996, Cox created *Yo Mama*, a series in which she embodied a Black Mother Goddess while challenging the whiteness of western religious iconography. Inspired by Queen Nanny, an 18th-century iconic female figure in Jamaican history who helped free nearly 1,000 enslaved people on the island, Cox created *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, a series of images exhibited at the Jamaican Biennial in 2006. By portraying 21st-century women and men of color in place of the Founding Fathers in *The Signing*, —Cox’s recent project, an ambitious 12-foot-long photograph— she serves a sharp response to Howard Chandler Christy’s painting, *Scene at The Signing of the Constitution of the United States*.

Nona Faustine graduated from her program and in a few short years
her work had been shown at institutions including the Ford Foundation, the Smithsonian and acquired by leading art organizations including Brooklyn Museum and the Carnegie Museum.

In her series Mitochondria, Faustine offers representations of Black motherhood in photographs she has taken of herself, her mother, her sister, and her daughter in their shared home in Brooklyn, New York. In this work, Faustine creates images calling on the viewer to think about “how we (Black mothers) have mothered and sustained our families with love and richness,” and “the
beauty of how we carry ourselves in our everyday lives. Or how we make and create out of nothing.”

How do Black women subjected to the double oppression of racism and sexism use the camera to portray themselves truthfully? How do they, as photographer Ayana V. Jackson describes, fight “photography with photography?” In Black Matrilineage, Photography, and Representation: Another Way of Knowing, we ask how the Black female body, specifically the Black maternal body, navigates the interlocking Western socio-political structures that place a false narrative on her body and that of her mother, her grandmother and so on. We buck these falsities by elevating analysis and visual representations that highlight the joy, depth, dynamism and intrinsic brilliance that are a part of Black motherhood. We are interested in filling the gaps that exist in photographic representation and disrupting the destructive, racist, and limiting image of Black motherhood.

The link between photography, representation and Black activism can be traced back to the early days of the medium when prominent abolitionists and orators Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass understood how images could mold narratives. Both Truth and Douglass knew that through photography, they could engage in what scholar Leigh Raiford calls critical Black memory, or how photography could serve as “an important resource for framing and mobilizing African American social and political identities and movements.”

Douglass frequently wrote about photography and deeply understood how it could serve as a necessary tool for Black people across the globe to be seen and represented as fully human. With this in mind, he demonstrated what Black freedom and dignity looked like—confident, in control and unafraid—when he posed throughout his lifetime and became the most-photographed person of the 19th century. Fellow abolitionist, women’s rights activist and orator, Sojourner Truth sold carte de visites, or small-sized photographs often mounted on cardboard, which included the phrase “I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance. Sojourner Truth,” at her lectures and via the postal service to earn a living. As she became increasingly popular, Truth shrewdly registered her cartes de visite as engravings and in turn, legally owned the copyright of her image in her etchings. Upon this, Truth reflected that she “used to be sold for other people’s benefit, but now she sold herself for her own.”

This double oppression of racism and sexism bound to the social stigmas of motherhood situates the overwhelming visual representation of Black motherhood as a site of grief and disempowerment, layered with mythologies tied to what Patricia Collins called controlling images. In this, Black mothers are offered a limited script of mammy, matriarch, welfare queen or jezebel as they
are not afforded the full range of emotional expression. In her 1993 essay Racism and Patriarchy in the Meaning of Motherhood, Dorothy E. Roberts examines the interaction between racism and patriarchy in the social construction of motherhood. She argues that the “patriarchy denied to Black mothers the authority and joy of mothering which it allowed white mothers.” These beliefs, rooted in slavery, falsely portray Black mothers as less deserving of motherhood and have been prevalent throughout history. As early as the first photographs, the Black mother in pictures existed as a “faithful” wet nurse posing with her (white) charge in colonial family albums. She is invisible and dehumanized while her own experience as a mother is denied. At the turn of the 20th century when Black mothers were represented with their children, social workers and sociologists took photographs of young mothers and misleadingly positioned them and their families as poor and dependent on welfare; in exchange, the mothers received what was rightly theirs, access to health services, food and assistance obtaining employment. A deep and expansive exploration into the topic of Black women in photographic history can be found in The Black Female Body: A Photographic History by Deborah Willis and Carla Williams. Through their research, we see examples of European 19th century photography that used Black female bodies to support colonialism, scientific evolution via medical apartheid and the sexualizing and fetishizing of Black women and girls. In Post-Emancipation
and Post-Reconstruction America, “the desire to act rather than be acted upon, to be a subject rather than an object, took hold with regard to representation.”

In contemporary image making, not unlike Truth’s radical understanding of the medium, Black women photographers “have used their own likeness and those of other black women to create an autobiography of the body and to develop themes of home, family gender, representation and identity in contemporary society.”

Family Pictures

In the early 1980s, while in graduate school, artist Carrie Mae Weems was documenting her own multigenerational family story as seen in her body of work titled “Family Pictures and Stories.” In this series, Weems photographs her family to provide an intimate and truthful look at African-American family life. Nearly forty years later, photographer Nona Faustine began the ongoing
photographic series *Mitochondria* (2008–) working consciously to give her daughter a visual diary as evidence of how much she was loved.

Although Weems’ *Family Pictures and Stories* and Faustine’s *Mitochondria* are separated by time, both bodies of work serve as counterpunches to the 1965 report, “The Negro Family: A Case Study for National Action,” also known as the Moynihan Report. The report, which became one of the most controversial documents of the twentieth century, continues to reinforce racist stereotypes and paint a false and denigrating depiction of the Black family. Weems and Faustine not only rebuke false claims made in the report but expose a deeper and more complicated understanding of power dynamics, society, and history while also sharing sensitive and nuanced expressions of Black love.

In 1990 Weems created *The Kitchen Table Series* (1990), a twenty image and fourteen text panel series of staged narrative scenes centered around a kitchen table lit by a single light. She performs the role of the women, of which the characters of her relationships appear and disappear—friends, a lover, and children. The series became a seminal body of work and opened the way for future women artists, and Black women in particular. Speaking specifically about the image *Untitled (Woman and Daughter with Makeup)*, scholar Salamishah Tillet writes that the women and daughter pictured “see each other, their black woman and black girl selves, in spite of the gendered and racial invisibility into which they both were born.” Reflecting upon the image, she shares a memory of seeing her own daughter looking in the mirror and writes “reflected back is a child who hasn’t been taught to un-love herself.”

This act of re-envisioning how we see and make images is one in which Black female artists are tethered to their matrilineal precursors. And the connection is not rooted in a legacy filled with guilt and burden, but rather, is full of devotion and love; Black women and artists bind themselves together in this manner to continue the quest for Black freedom, ensure their histories are not forgotten, and bring forward the spirit of their ancestors, both familial and artistic. This can be seen when Alice Walker designates her precursor an author of Black legend and Black female liberation (Zora Neale Hurston), a woman who facilitates what Adrienne Rich calls “re-vision” and who enables female possibility; her dedication, that is, her inscription and devotion to Hurston acknowledges that, without predecessors, a writer cannot write, since texts enable other texts.

While *Black Matrilineage, Photography, and Representation: Another Way of Knowing* supports and centers the discussion surrounding motherhood in marginalized communities, we acknowledge there is much work left to be done and recognize that motherhood can be defined in many ways. Research on LGBTQA+
Black motherhood pioneered by scholar Mignon Moore as well as images taken by H. Lenn Keller, founder of California’s Bay Area Lesbian Archives, provide a more holistic view of how race, class, and gender identity intersect with family formation and societal acceptance. In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: A New American Grammar Book” literary critic and Black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers reminds us that “motherHOOD is a status granted by patriarchy to white middle-class women, those women whose legal rights to their children are never questioned, regardless of who does the labor (the how) of keeping them alive,” and continues, “MotherING is another matter, a possible action, the name for that nurturing work, that survival dance, worked by enslaved women who were forced to breastfeed the children of the status mothers while having no control over whether their birth or chosen children were sold away.”

Motherhood encompasses care in its many iterations and mothering is not limited to gender identity as can be seen in the “house mothers in ball culture who provide spaces of self-love and expression for/as queer youth of color in the street.”

Othermothering, which is rooted in principles of African collectivism, is defined as the practice by which female neighbors, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, or other women step in to care for children they have not biologically birthed. Where we find othermothering, we often find extended communities concerned with mutual care, public health and social activism. This can be seen when Black women artists Kay Brown, Dindga McCannon, and Faith Ringgold, formed a childcare collective to help ensure fellow Black mother artists had time and space to create.

Most recently, we have seen how Black women continue to organize and manage critical mutual aide networks in response to COVID-19; for example, Tanya Fields, owner and founder of the Black Feminist Project, created a South Bronx-based food pantry program that ensured families in need received farm-fresh local produce, with no questions asked, while offering a pay-what-you-can model. Black motherhood and othermothering continue to exist in these ways and as “mothering of the mind,” a means to share knowledge and build confidence through the sisterhood that binds Black women together.

How do Black women and Black mothers in particular, care for themselves and continue to claim spaces that rightfully belong to them with power and joy?

For nearly twenty years, photographer Sheila Pree Bright has documented the complexities of Black life. With her extensive body of work #1960Now, she
Sheila Pree Bright, Mothers, 2019. Tynesha Tilson (Atlanta); Wanda Johnson (Oakland, CA.); Felicia Thomas (Atlanta); Gwen Carr (New York); Monteria Robinson (Atlanta); Dr. Roslyn Pope, author of “An Appeal for Human Rights” (Atlanta); Dalphine Robinson; (Atlanta); Patricia Scott (Atlanta); Montye Benjamin (Atlanta); and Samaria Rice (Cleveland). © Sheila Pree Bright, courtesy of the artist

Sheila Pree Bright, Installation at 190 Pryor Street in Atlanta, 2019, © Sheila Pree Bright, courtesy of the artist

has photographed protests across the country, fulfilling the role of timeless visual bonds that tether the Black Lives Matter movement of today and the Civil Rights protests of the 1960s, together. More recently her lens has focused on the mothers who lost their children to police brutality and other acts of
racial violence. When asked why she tirelessly documents the tensions and conflicts between police and the communities most affected by racial violence and police brutality, Pree Bright responds, “I was unwilling to sit on the sidelines.”

“When a Black body is born, they’re born into a movement whether they’re conscious of it or not, and it’s called the Black Liberation Struggle,” “It’s a perpetual revolution.”

When Bright was chosen to create a public art piece in Atlanta in celebration of the 2019 Super Bowl, she knew she wanted to produce a photo-mural recalling the activism of the 1960s. During her research Bright found an image taken in 1963 by acclaimed American photographer Richard Avedon. In the photo, there are several young activists standing with Julian Bond, co-founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), holding his young daughter in his arms. When Bright saw the image, she thought of the mothers who lost their children to police brutality and other acts of racial violence and knew she wanted to photograph them.

In the summer of 2019, Bright and Felicia Thomas, mother of Nicholas Thomas, killed by the police in 2015, came together to create a safe space for mothers to openly share unimaginable experiences, lean on one another, and build community. They organized a retreat in Atlanta and invited mothers from across the country including Samaria Rice, the mother of Tamir Rice, who was killed by the police at the age of 12; Oscar Grant’s mother, Wanda Johnson; and Eric Garner’s mother, Gwen Carr. Bright found an Airbnb to host the women; in our conversations with her, she noted that the mothers were treated to massages, meals cooked by a local chef, and given plaques to acknowledge their activism. During this time, Bright created the photograph that would become the photo mural Mothers, March On, in the Vine City neighborhood, where women activists, women’s labor advocates, and members of SNCC’s Atlanta Vine City Project once lived.

“The retreat brought us together so the moms didn’t feel like they were alone,” Ms. Thomas said in a recent New York Times article. “It was such a spiritual moment when all of the moms were there at the photo shoot and you could feel the camaraderie, love, joy and what we stand for. We also needed a break from it all to just have fun and get to know each other. It’s so important to take care of yourself. If you can’t take care of yourself, you can’t take care of your family and you can’t think clearly and move forward in the world.”
Black Matrilineage, Photography, and Representation: Another Way of Knowing begins with an analysis of Black mothers who create innovative counter-cultures and communal digital networks, in a manner similar to Truth and Douglass, while generating new visual representations demonstrating the complexities of Black life. These themes serve as the underlying thread in “More Black and More Beautiful: Social Media & Digital Culture in Rewriting the Self,” the first section of this volume. In “Regarding the Pain of Our Own: Jazmine Headley, Portraiture, and the Sorrow of Black Motherhood,” scholar Brie McLemore explores writer and activist Susan Sontag’s work Regarding the Pain of Others, by looking at what it means for the pain and violence inflicted upon Black mothers to “go viral.” She discusses how photography can serve as a testimony to the history of trauma and a radical tool for Black mothers to see themselves. Jennifer L. Turner’s essay investigates how memes can perpetuate false tropes of Black mothers and the impact they have on how Black mothers view their ability to care and mother.

In “Black Motherhood Online, A Reimagined Representation,” historian Kellie Carter Jackson speaks with Tomi Akitunde, co-founder and editor-in-chief of mater mea a blog and podcast series dedicated to Black moms. In the essay, Carter Jackson describes how photography “was rooted in our pain. And even when you see these vintage photos of Black families, the pain is still there, the pain of their circumstances is still there.” Carter Jackson and Akitunde continue by discussing how with technological advances, “We’re telling our story and joy, finding joy in our stories...” Through sharing her personal journey into social media as a site to resist stale narratives, writer and mother Marly Pierre-Louis pens an essay that asks what happens when Black motherhood moves beyond being the act of protest. The answer is a celebration full of love and joy as well as an exploration and acknowledgement of the erotic lives of Black mothers.

The second section, titled “‘Turning the Face of History to Your Face’: Seeing the Self Through Representations of Black Motherhood,” considers the role of photographs, as both a family and community archive, in rerooting the Black experience to a place grounded in truth, depth, dignity and pride. How photographer Deana Lawson situated Black mothers as beings who conjure a cosmic and primordial relationship with themselves, their families and communities and the earth, is detailed in an interview between Lawson and Susan L. Thompson, independent writer and curator. Writer and activist Eslanda...
Robeson’s ability to use photography as a means to create and uplift connections between Africa and the Diaspora is discussed in Emily Brady’s essay ““I Like to Make Pictures of Children”: African American Women Photographers and Wielding the Weapon of ‘Motherhood’. The critical role early 20th century Black female photographers and business owners Wilhelmina Pearl Selina Roberts, Elnora Teal, and Florestine Collins, played in combating racist stereotypes of Black families through making portraits is discussed in detail. In “Photographic Afterimages: Nationalism and Images of Motherhood in Canada,” Rachel Lobo sheds light on how, through photography, Black women in Canada were able to “create representations that corresponded to the realities, hopes, and aspirations within their own lives.” In Atalie Gerhard’s “Losses Not to Be Passed On: Paula C. Johnson’s and Sara Bennett’s Portraits Rewriting (Ex-) Incarcerated Black Mothers,” we see how photography can provide Black mothers in particular, with tools to critique structural systems of oppression, counter tropes and be memorialized with truth, dignity and respect. The section ends with a poem by historian Sasha Turner, which calls on the reader to reckon with imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy.

The third section entitled ““You Are Your Best Thing’: Self-Care as a Site of Resistance,” proceeds with a timely discussion on the importance of self-care, self-preservation and how networks of Black women support one another to ensure this critical work happens. The history and legacy of visual representations of Black pregnant women, in addition to the ways in which visual media can be used to liberate the body and create more truthful narratives, are examined in Haile Eshe Cole’s essay, “Worth a Thousand Words: Visualizing Black Motherhood and Health.” In Nicole J. Caruth’s interview with artist Andrea Chung & Public Health Administrator and Change Agent D’Yuanna Allen-Robb, she asks the crucial question: what is the role of photography in contemporary movements for maternal justice? Caruth looks to midwifery and art as a means of healing. In “Three Black Mothers in a Cleveland Cabaret,” Rhaisa Williams examines how Black mothers prioritize bliss and self-love through photographs of Black social nightlife, privileging Black mothers showcasing what bell hooks calls “pictorial genealogies” of families, extended communities.30

Section four titled “In Search of My Mother’s Garden, I Found My Own’: Black Female Photographers and the Matrilineal Space,” explores Black matrilineage and the ways in which it intersects with maternal legacies. Renée Mussai poignantly opens this section with “Letter IV: Where Are They – M/othering R/evolutions,” a deeply personal piece to artist and friend Muholi,
marked in time by the anniversary of the 1956 Women’s March on Pretoria. Mussai’s piece explores how Muholi demonstrates that “all r/evolutions also, existentially, fundamentally, begin with our mothers and acts of m/othering.” Artist Nona Faustine’s intimate relationships with herself, her mother, her sister, and her daughter are traced back to the Eve Gene, the first shared ancestor of every living human on Earth in historian, and curator of Afro-Diasporic fashion and visual culture Jonathan Michael Square’s essay “Every day is Mother’s Day in My Book: Black Motherhood in the Work of Nona Faustine Simmons”. In “The Impossibility of Breathing When the Sun Covers Your Face,” artist Marcia Michael retrieves lost narratives and oral histories of her ancestors, revealing how these stories survived in her mother’s body, and describes the process by which the narratives live within her. The section ends with “The Motherland Between Us,” an essay by scholar Grace Ali. Using her familial ties to Guyana as an example, Ali taps into a deeper meaning unveiling the ways in which motherland, migration, death, and loss are inextricably linked.

Curated Plates: The Assertion of the Lifeforce

How do Black women artists hear the calls of their maternal bonds, both living and dead, the whispers from a motherland spoken in a mother tongue? What do their answers look like? A visual exploration of Black motherhood through pictures made by Black female identifying photographers serves as a response to the call, a reflection of the past and a portal to the future. While there is no one story told by these artists, there is a thread or cord of sorts that connects their images and brings a material reality of what cannot be seen, but rather felt. In this, these artists begin to fill the gaps of representation of Black mothers and mothering with what Audre Lorde named the erotic or “the assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.” This act of knowing is often told in the secret language passed between mothers, daughters, kin and defies time as seen in the works of Lebohang Kganye, Adama Delphine Fawundu, Keisha Scarville, and Marcia Michael, who reminds us that “we search for our mothers in order to find ourselves.” Artist Nydia Blas reveals a visual meditation that is delicately spun into a mythical allegory with young Black women and girls fulfilling the roles of mothers, warriors, sirens and saints. Photographer, writer and curator Qiana Mestrich continues this
repositioning of Black women and Black mothers in particular, by properly placing them as the original makers and their children as collaborators with both inseparably connected to nature, in the images included in this section. Andrea Chung’s intricate and tactile collages elevate materials of the everyday and the natural world while examining history, slavery, medicine, connections to the mother(land), and how Black women continue to serve as the “protectors of mothers, women and babies.” Through the use of collage, found objects and magazine cuttings, artist Wangechi Mutu creates portraits that further explore colonialism, fetishization, and the impact of medical apartheid on Black women.

Notions of dignifying the ordinary are further explored by Deana Lawson and Mickalene Thomas, who reveal the divine matrilineal legacy of Black people and Black women in particular to locate “the magnificent and have it come through in the picture.” Placing Black women in control of their image and legacy by unraveling false histories connected to place is seen in the works by Nona Faustine and Samantha Box who describes how “in chaos of these slippery intersections, there is the chance to measure (my) knotty personal, ancestral, and historical narratives.” While partaking in “memory work,” Ayana V. Jackson’s elucidates history through unearthing links to the past, unveiling and questioning “have been taught to forget.” In their photographs and three-dimensional creations, Mary Sibande and Vanessa German create a world that is self-affirming, exploratory, and fantastical. And this world, which incorporates elements of Afrofuturism, articulates a present as well as future experience that insists on the presence of Black women and girls made by Black women and girls. The artists in this special curated section serve as talismans conjuring maternal and matrilineal legacies while reclaiming the innate brilliance of Black women through personal stories, history, political acts, connections to place, moments of pleasure, and communal celebration.

As artists, mothers and photo educators with a curatorial practice, we as *Women Picturing Revolution* work to expand the framework for understanding history and visual representation through examining the work of woman lens-based artists who document crises, conflicts, revolution and joy in private realms and public spaces. We were most interested in themes of mother(ing), human rights, mutual care in areas of conflict which became central to our conversations on photography. We began to ask who the women documenting conflict in private realms and public spaces are. We gathered hundreds of examples of work being made by both well known and lesser known photographers. We were particularly interested in work that uses social media
to bear witness, or connected people displaced by violence. We asked what the long term effects of trauma are. What does it look like when women tell these stories on their own terms?

The topic of this volume began with a one day seminar at Columbia University’s Institute for Research in African-American Studies (IRAAS) entitled “Woman Picturing Revolution: Focus on Africa and the African Diaspora.” We examined contemporary photography and the conditions under which women in and/or from Africa or the African Diaspora make images. These works included photography made as a personal response to the legacy and locales of slavery, political oppression, and the inability to act, to well-known photojournalists and emerging voices using social media platforms to document political and social upheavals.

With over forty contributors hailing from North America, Africa and Europe and work ranging from academic writing, interviews, poetry, documentary practice to fine art photography, Black Matrilineage, Photography, and Representation: Another Way of Knowing offers a cross section of analysis and art on the topic of Black motherhood, representation, and the participation of photography in the process. We offer this volume as a probe to uncover the intersection of representational justice, Black motherhood and photography. By situating photographs and contemporary scholarship made by and/or about Black motherhood at a critical intersection that supports the heritage and legacies initiated by Black women and their female ancestors, we bear witness to and help bring forth a wider and richer expression of motherhood—in essence, another way of seeing and knowing.

Research for this volume began in 2018 and throughout its creation we were working together but in our separate households, less than one mile apart. Our separation was due to a global pandemic that left the world with no choice but to bear witness to the murders of Black men, women, and children. And we hear the voice of George Floyd crying out for his mother with his last breath. Black mothers have not only been summoned at the moment but have been answering this call as community anchors since time immemorial. Black mothers continue to be truth-bearers showing all of us “another way of knowing;” will we listen?

Notes


6 In 2001, Yo Mama’s Last Supper, 1996 was exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum exhibition Committed to the Image: Contemporary Black Photographers, a show of some 200 works by 98 African-American photographers. The then mayor of New York, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani deemed an image from Cox’s Yo Mama series indecent and anti-Catholic and declared he would appoint a commission to set decency standards; his commission was never realized.


8 The series’ title Mitochondria refers to the mitochondrial DNA encoded in human genes, which is inherited solely from the mother.


This arrangement resulted in the exhibition “Where We At”—Black Women Artists, 1971, as was described in the Brooklyn Museum’s paramount exhibition, *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85*.


Bright, S. P. interview with editors on November 5, 2016.


We (Women Picturing Revolution) and essayist Dr. Jennifer L. Turner, made the conscious decision not to show the memes referenced in her essay in an effort to rebuke the perpetuation of these images.


The Object of My Gaze. [online] Available at: <https://skindeepmag.com/articles/the-object-of-my-gaze> [Accessed 27 October 2021].


