Coming to New York from Tuskegee Institute gave me the chance to share in the cultural wellspring that was bubbling up in 1970s Harlem. Where else could I hear poetry slams by Amiri Baraka at the Schomburg Center, listen to Minister Louis Farrakhan’s rallies at Malcolm Shabazz Mosque or Olatunji playing his drums in Mount Morris Park, browse Michaux’s African National Memorial Bookstore at the corner of 125th Street and Seventh Avenue, or watch Black Panthers protest against the displacement of black-owned businesses? Although I lived in Brooklyn, I ventured to Harlem almost daily to experience the street life there that brimmed with new confidence in being black, embracing Africanness, and giving voice to visions of a new world where the black point of view had a seat at the policy-making table.

I focused my work on giving visual imagery to the black consciousness that arose out of the civil rights era and African studies. I made the rounds of exhibits and literary festivals looking for opportunities to make publicity portraits, and my images began to appear in a few books and on a book cover for the poet Nikki Giovanni.

To support my family and my work, I sought out freelance opportunities at the New York Times Arts and Leisure section and Channel 13. Nikki Giovanni introduced me to Ellis Haizlip, her friend and the producer of Soul! Recognizing that I had skills that could serve him well, he hired me to shoot the publicity stills for the show.

Producing publicity images for Soul! gave me a privileged window
into the black arts movement of the 1970s and a unique opportunity to observe how lighting directors and studio directors manage in a television setting. *Soul!* was a very political show of music and jazz interspersed with in-depth, informative interviews. Each session began with the director working with the stage manager, technicians, camera operators, and audio staff to set up different areas of performance. When the talent arrived, they went to their dressing rooms, where stylists awaited to work their hair and apply makeup.

Each hour-long show was edited down from eight to ten hours of setups, rehearsals, and actual tapings. We always had to be ready for however long it took to finish the show; to appease hunger and thirst, a buffet was provided for the staff and talent during the setup period. The audience poured in closer to taping time.

I learned so much from my days with *Soul!,* overhearing the banter and rich conversations about issues of the day. For me, the weekly productions were more like creative workshops and helped verify my own struggles with my personal work.

As a twenty-six-year-old from Alabama who had been introduced to jazz for the first time at the Tuskegee Institute, I was immensely fortunate to find myself in a television studio where live performances of the great jazz and R&B musicians and discussions with the celebrated poets, essayists, novelists, filmmakers, and political theorists of our time brought the new wave of black culture to a national television audience. I can best describe my time there as being in *Soul!* heaven.

**CHESTER HIGGINS**