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Abdurraqib, Hanif. "The Timeless Pleasures Of Dawoud Bey's Street Portraits." *The New Yorker*. April 15, 2021.

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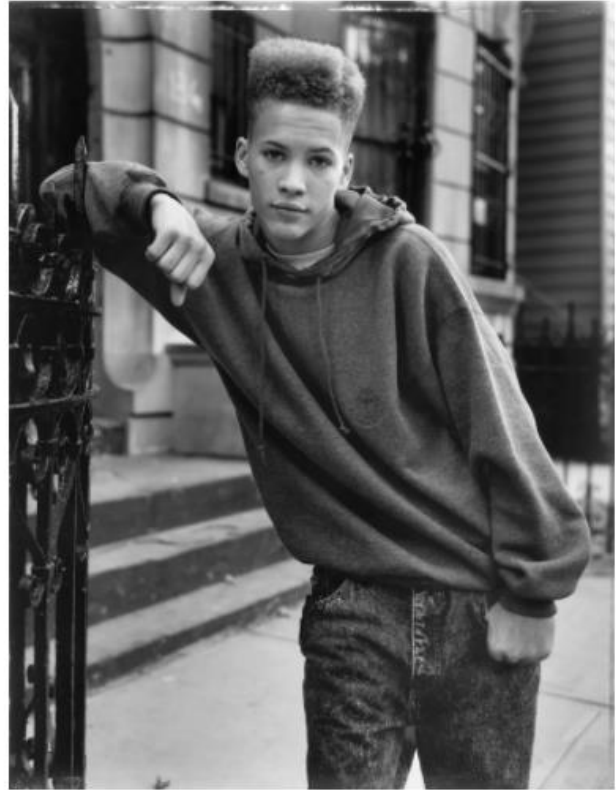


Photographs by Dawoud Bey / Courtesy MACK

A few years ago, while on a road-trip assignment with the photographer Andre Wagner, I began to needle him with questions about street photography. I wanted to know about the emotional mechanics and structure of it: what a photographer's eye picks up, what makes a stranger agree to a moment of intimacy with someone she may never see again. Andre told me that it primarily entailed getting people to trust you within a short window of time. But there was another secret, too. Andre loved photographing Black people. They were familiar to him, as he was to them. He could read their cues, and sense their excitement. And so many of the Black people he encountered were eager to have their photos taken, just one adjustment away from being camera-ready.

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I thought of my conversation with Andre while immersed in a new book from the photographer Dawoud Bey, "[Street Portraits](#)," which collects his images from the late eighties and early nineties. Bey, who is sixty-eight and one of the most influential living photographers in the U.S., came of age in Queens, and gained an interest in photography for how it offered an opportunity to show the communities he knew. He showed his first solo exhibit, "Harlem, U.S.A.," at the Studio Museum in 1979, and has been celebrated, over the last four decades, for his rich, nuanced images of Black American life. (A retrospective of Bey's career will be on display at the Whitney Museum this spring.) Though Bey has recently turned toward more conceptual work, he is most renowned for his portraiture: he spent fifteen years making photographs of high-school students for a series called "Class Pictures," and shot a portrait of Barack Obama, then a Presidential hopeful, in 2007.

[Hanif Abdurraqib](#) is a writer from the east side of Columbus, Ohio. His most recent book is "[A Little Devil in America](#)."

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