

Picturing Black American Families

"No one picture tells the whole story. Each photograph is a beat in the rhythm of a song yet unfinished..."

—Eric Easter, D. Michael Cheers, and Dudley Brooks
Songs of My People, 1992

Each of the ten photographs presented here tells a different story of an American family. Yet each of these stories is incomplete, for these images capture only fleeting moments within lifetimes. These are mere fragments of much larger and more complex pictures that make up each of these families' experiences. Just like images that appear in news and social media, these photographs communicate tiny parts of the overall stories of Black Americans.

Nonetheless, this selection of documentary photos from 1953 through 2001 showcases poignant moments, picturing them against the intimate backdrop of daily life. These candid images celebrate close bonds and cross-generational relationships as well as highlight both the diversity and the similarity of familial experiences. Capturing both change and continuity over time, they clearly portray people from different times in modern and contemporary memory, while they convey timeless themes of caregiving, comforting, togetherness, and enduring love.

This exhibition unites photographs from three remarkable collections preserved at the University of Missouri. Two of these collections are held in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, and the third collection is the archive of the Missouri Photo Workshop at the School of Journalism. The first collection from the Museum consists of 151 black-and-white photos from the exhibition *Songs of My People*, which toured both nationally and internationally from 1990 through 1992. The original project included over fifty Black photographers whose works document the Black and African American experience all within the period of about one week in 1989.

The second collection from the Museum is a photo-essay of 1997 and 1998, titled *Commitment: Fatherhood in Black America*, by local photographer Carole Patterson. Combining images with quotations from the fathers and children depicted, this project offers meaningful insight into the essential roles of fathers in Black American culture.

The third collection from the Missouri Photo Workshop is an extensive photojournalism archive compiled for sixty-seven years and counting; since 1949 the Workshop has annually invited leading national and international photographers to document life in all parts of Missouri, mostly in rural or small-town communities. This exhibition features families from Boonville, Kearney, Kirksville, Lebanon, Lexington, Saint Louis, and Pemiscot County.



Geary G. Broadnax (American)

Widow Alison Leland, 1990

Houston, Texas

Gift of Dr. D. Michael Cheers/New African Visions, Inc. (95.6.23)

This joyful portrait depicts the family of the late U.S. Representative George Thomas (Mickey) Leland (1944–1989) of Houston, Texas. He was killed in a plane crash on August 7, 1989 while on a humanitarian trip in East Africa. Rep. Leland was then chairman of the House Select Committee on Hunger, a congressional group he helped found to respond to the crisis of domestic and world poverty and hunger.

When her husband died, Alison Leland was two-months pregnant. She did not know she was having twins until she went into premature labor in January, 1990. She named their sons Cameron George and Austin Mickey in honor of their father. On the mantle is an older photo of Mickey and Alison Leland with their first son, Jarrett.

Today, Alison Leland teaches political science in the Honors College at the University of Houston, where she is Director of the Bonner Leaders Program.



Bob Trow

Photograph from the story

Negroes—One 89 Years Old—His Friends, etc., 1953

Boonville, Missouri

Missouri Photo Workshop 5



Photographer unknown
Title unknown, 1956
Lexington, Missouri
Missouri Photo Workshop 8



Carole Patterson (American, b. 1937)

Untitled, 1997

Pemiscot County, Missouri

Museum purchase (R-97.9)

Roy Cooper, Jr. (1927-2010) turns to look at his grandson, who wears a matching white cap. "I have grandbabies now," Cooper said in 1997, "and that's the highlight of my life. My little grandboy, I call him 'my main man.' He'll be eight in May and wants to be everything just like papa. He even wants to get a haircut with a bald spot in the middle."

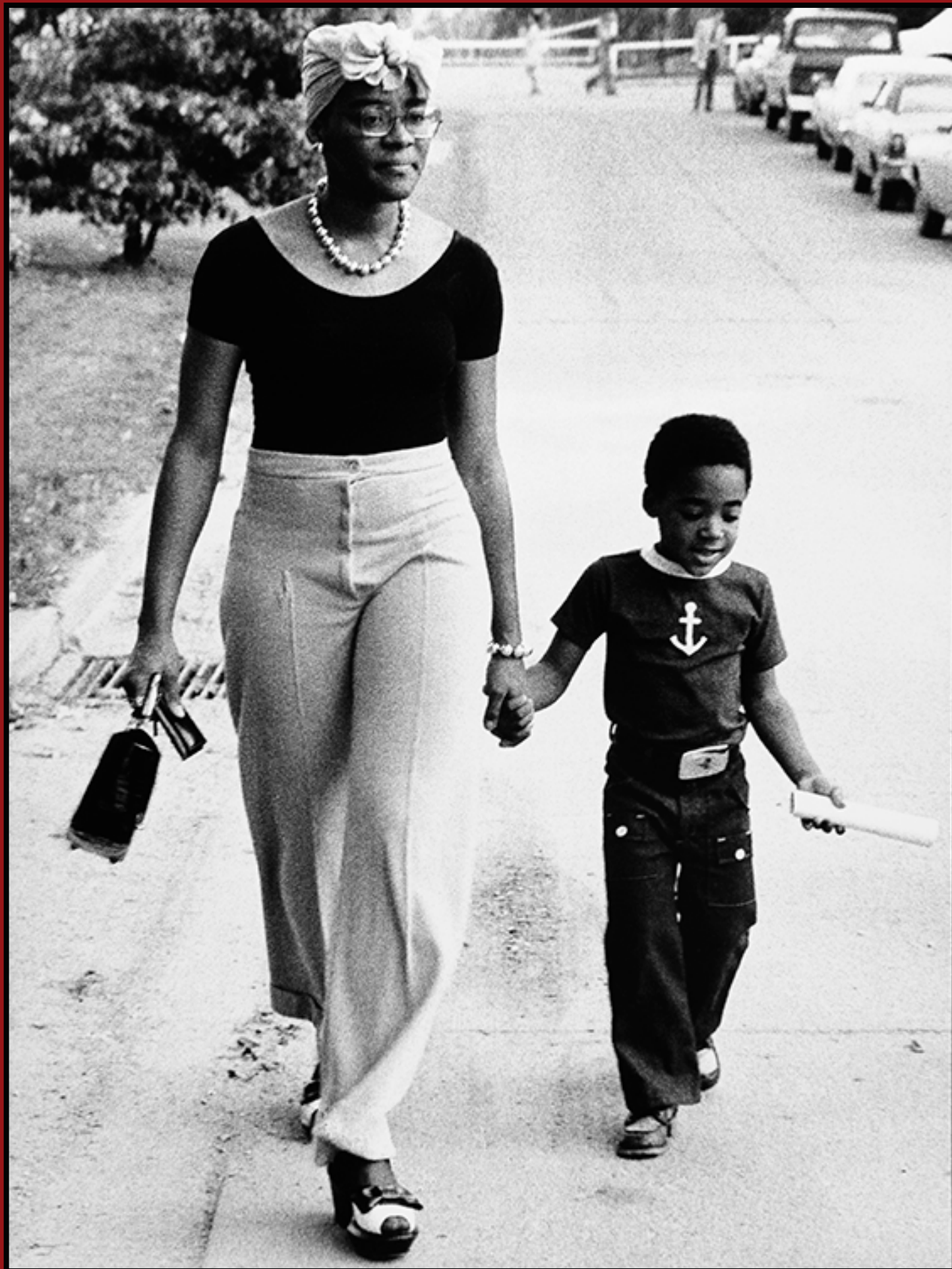


Christopher Covatta (American, b. 1950)

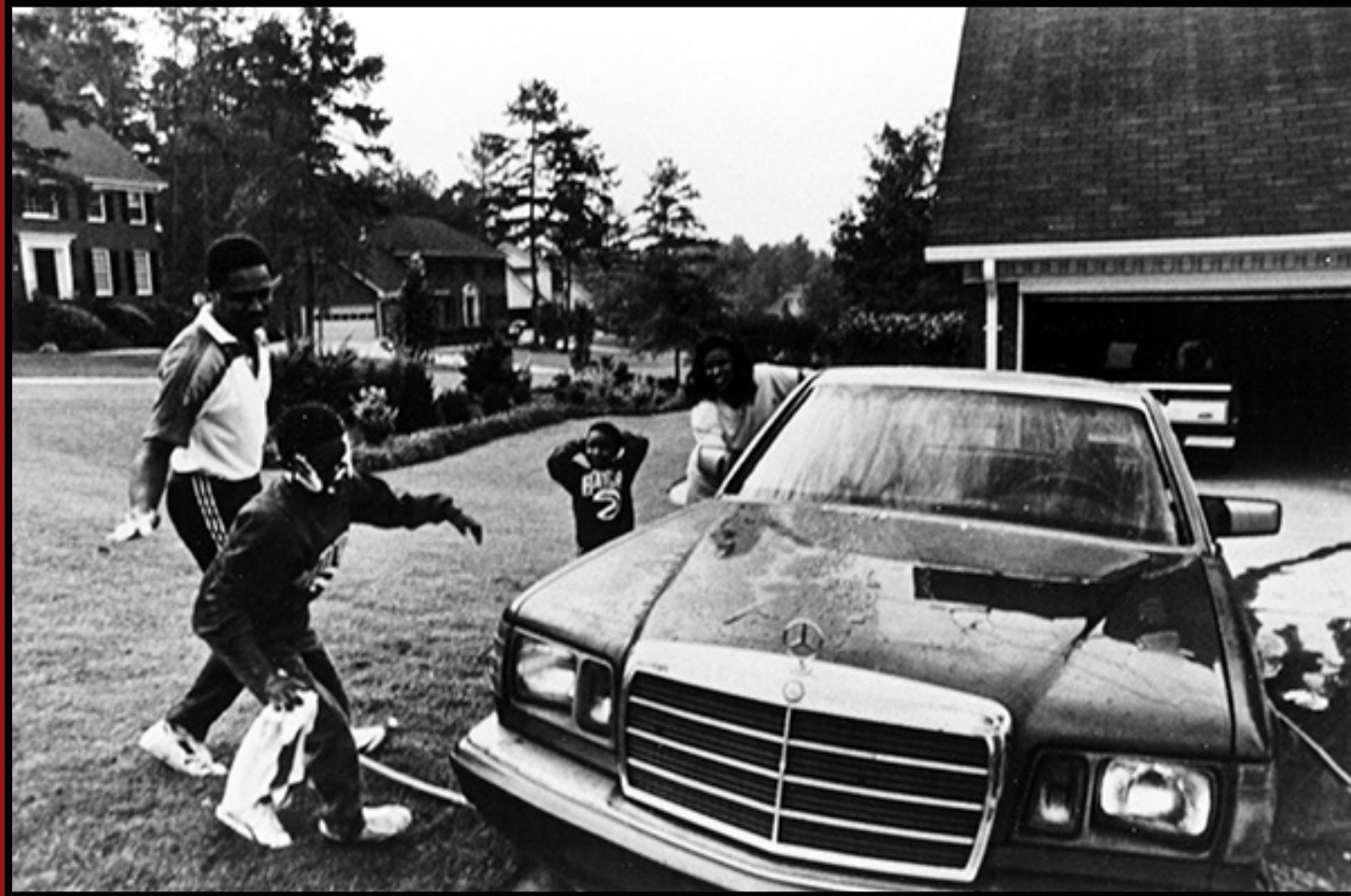
Interracial Couple, 1978

Lebanon, Missouri

Missouri Photo Workshop 30

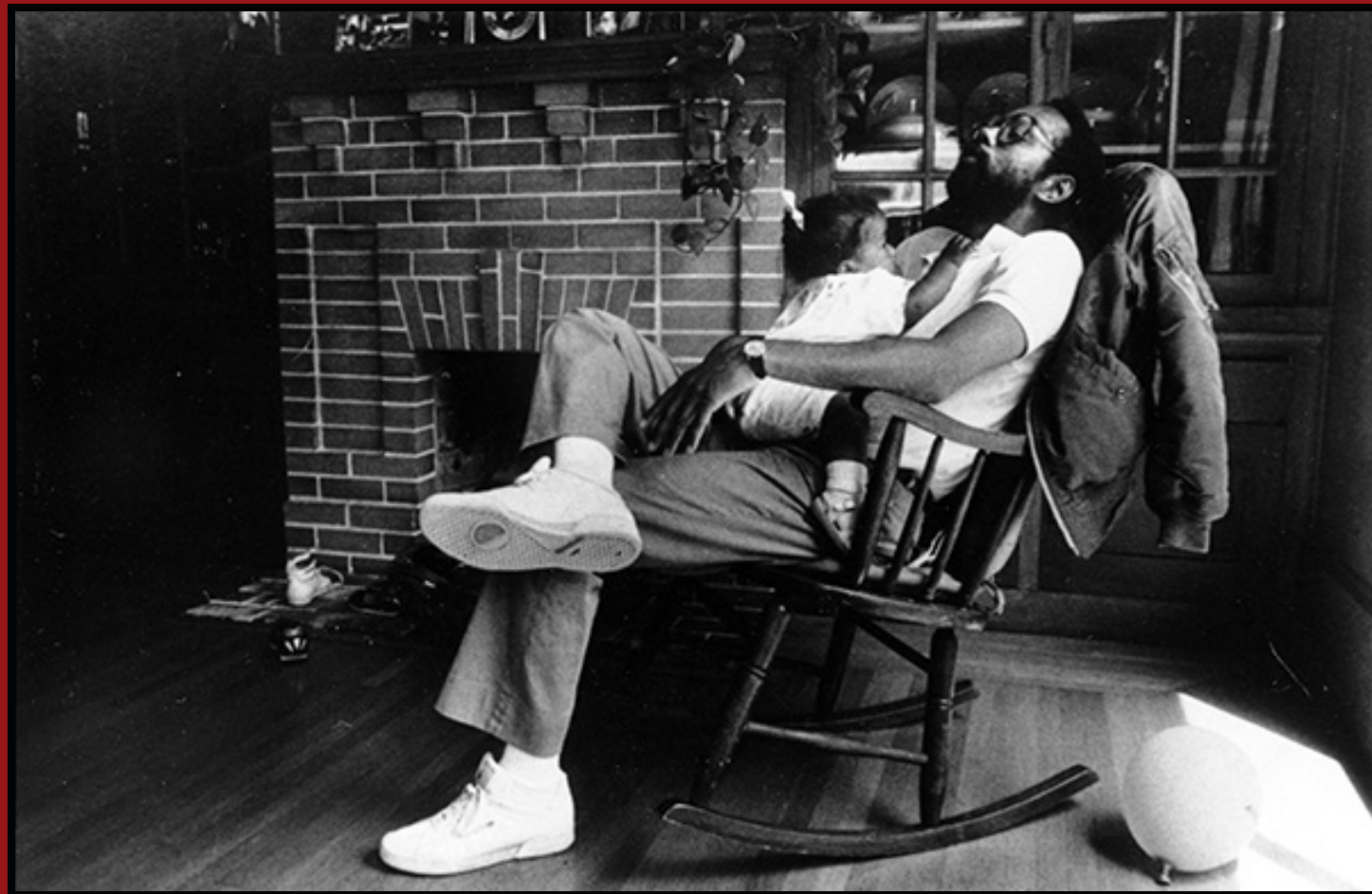


Nancy Moran (American, b. 1944)
Dwana Johnson, Black Mother, 1973
Kirksville, Missouri
Missouri Photo Workshop 25



Keith Hadley (American)
Saturday Morning Chores, 1990
Atlanta, Georgia

Gift of Dr. D. Michael Cheers/New African Visions, Inc. (95.6.32)



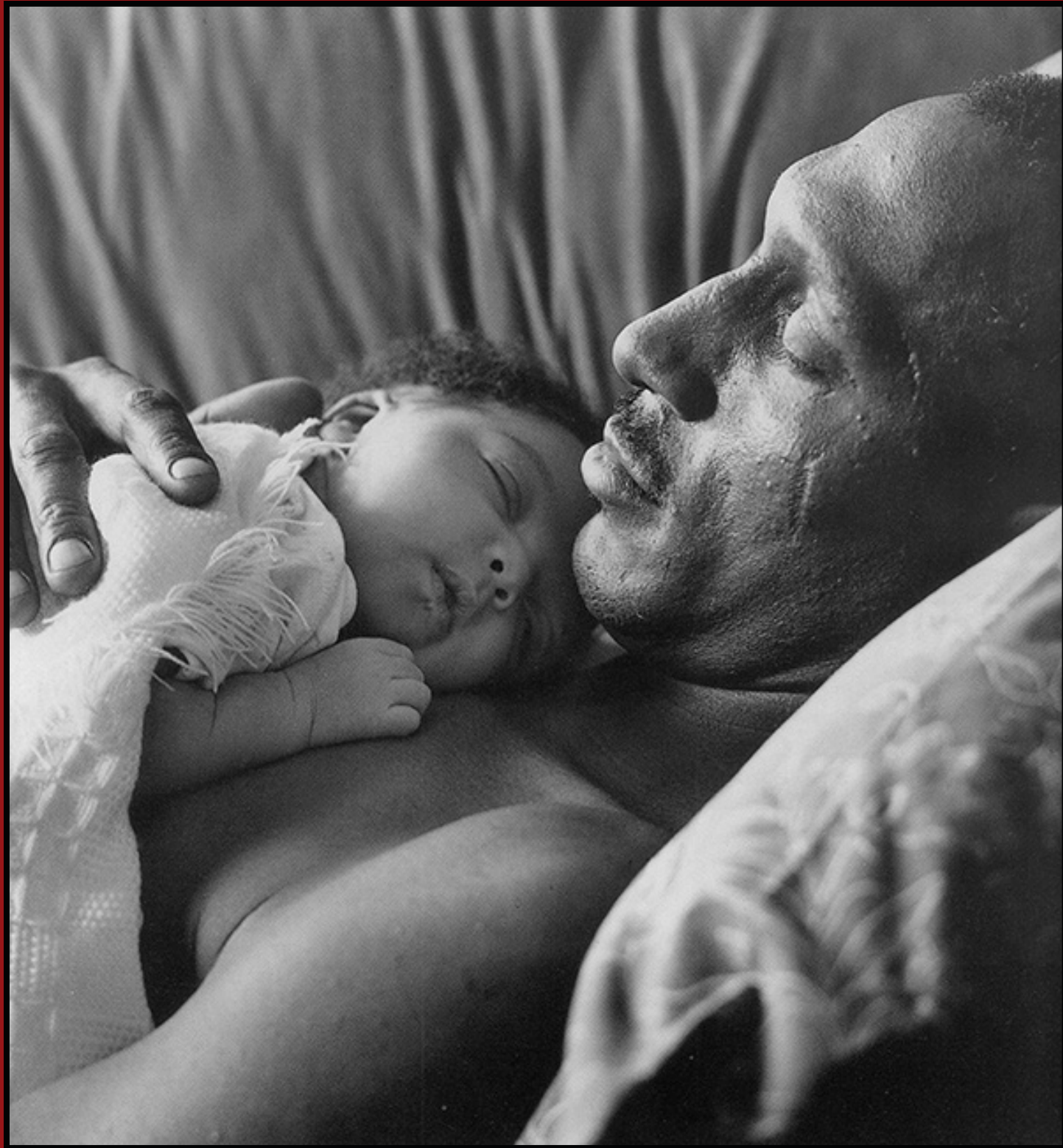
Bruce Talamon (American, b. 1949)
Dr. Washington and His Daughter, Erin, 1990
San Francisco, California

Gift of Dr. D. Michael Cheers/New African Visions, Inc. (95.6.39)

This quiet image captures Dr. A. Eugene Washington with his infant daughter, Erin, on a rare day off of work. At the time Dr. Washington chaired the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at the University of California–San Francisco.

An internationally recognized clinician and scholar, Dr. Washington has received numerous awards for his achievements in public health policy. He credits his caring upbringing for providing him a stable foundation. “Growing up in Houston, I benefitted from a tremendously nurturing and supportive community and family who instilled in me the core values of excellence, integrity and service – and these values have remained my life-long drivers,” said Dr. Washington in 2015.

Today, Dr. Washington is the Chancellor for Health Affairs at Duke University. Erin is twenty-seven years old and works in Boston.



Carole Patterson (American, b. 1937)

Untitled, 1997

Saint Louis, Missouri

Museum purchase (R-97.29)

Thurman Stubblefield of Saint Louis holds his sleeping daughter, Amelia. He had been raised by a single mother whose income was insecure, so it was important to Stubblefield to provide a stable household for his children. When Amelia was born, he confronted an ongoing problem with substance abuse: "Having my baby daughter made me open my eyes and say that I can't be any good to her whatsoever if I continued to live the way I'd been living." When this photo was taken, he worked seven days a week and maintained four jobs in order to support his family.



Ross Taylor (American, b. 1971)

Photograph from the story

Keyona and Serena: A New Start Laced with Love, 2001

Kearney, Missouri

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