

# rollingout 25

HOME » CULTURE

## Powerful images to celebrate during Black History Month

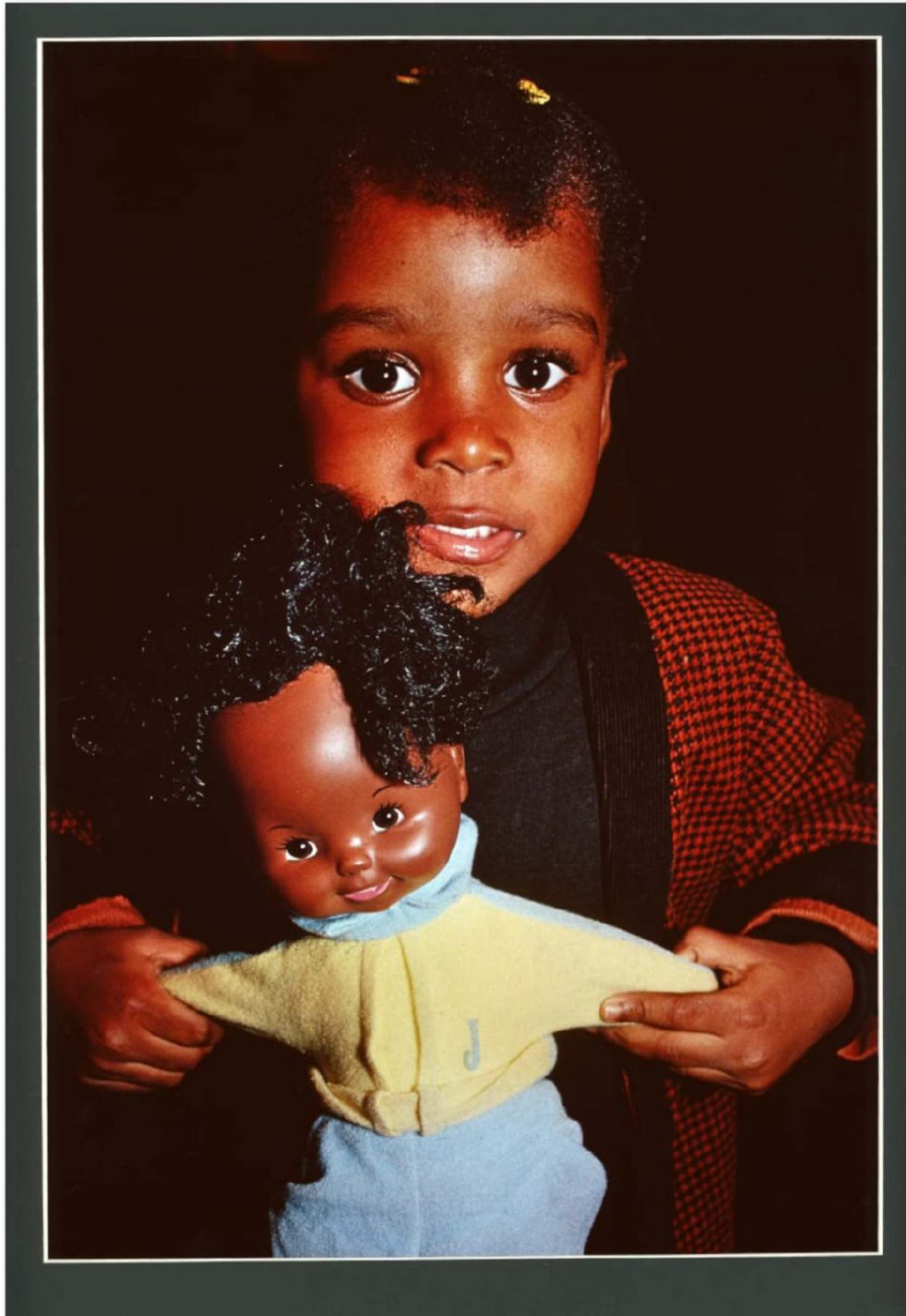
Black images in the spotlight at The New York Historical and at Dolan/Maxwell's booth at The Winter Show

BY SOULEO FEB 08, 2025 2:25 PM



Arlene Gottfried, Boy with Afro on Bicycle in front of Trash Cans, 1975. Photo Courtesy of The New York Historical.

In a new exhibition at The New York Historical and just in time for Black History Month, numerous photographs spotlight the life and spirit of New York City's Black population during the late 20th century. Although *Picture Stories: Photographs by Arlene Gottfried* is not solely focused on the Black experience, the subject matter does make up a significant and powerful portion of the show.



Arlene Gottfried, Monique's Daughter with Doll, circa 1990. Photo Courtesy of The New York Historical.

Gottfried, a White woman, noted in a [2015 interview](#) how living in Crown Heights in the 1980s led her to document the Black community. “At that time (the 80s), in my neighborhood, a lot of people moved out – the White flight syndrome. When I’d go out to school, I’d notice a moving truck every day, going to the suburbs. Then it became African-American and Puerto Rican, those were the main groups in that time. So my neighborhood influenced me very much. Being able to connect with certain subject matter that had I not lived in that environment, might’ve felt distanced or disconnected.”



Arlene Gottfried, *Eternal Light Choir Performing*, 1980. Photo Courtesy of The New York Historical.

During the opening reception for the exhibition, Gottfried's connection to her Black subjects was palpable in photographs such as *Eternal Light Choir Performing*. After coming across the choir at a Gospel Fest in an abandoned gas station in New York City's Lower East Side, Gottfried eventually joined the choir and documented them in a book *The Eternal Light*. In other photographs such as *Boy with Afro on Bicycle in front of Trash Cans* she depicts everyday life for Black people in New York City.

Exhibition curator Marilyn S. Kushner hopes that the show makes underrepresented aspects of New York City's history accessible and engaging for audiences. "Some people read history and some people look at history," she said. "Arlene Gottfried has us looking at history that some words can't describe and that's the beauty of what she did. She showed us a part of New York that some people don't know but that she knew intimately and that she loved and it loved her."





Arlene Gottfried, Rick James with Two Women in Furs, 1981. Photo Courtesy of The New York Historical.

Gottfried, the older sister of the late comedian and actor Gilbert Gottfried, died in 2017. The exhibition marks the recent acquisition by The New York Historical, of almost 300 of Gottfried's photographs. Thus, ensuring that her legacy and the stories of the Black people she documented will live on.