

GLADSTONE GALLERY

LaToya Ruby Frazier, "The Geography of Oppression," *The Atlantic*, April 03, 2018

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The Geography of Oppression

Shooting from a helicopter, the artist LaToya Ruby Frazier documented how King's assassination affected the physical structures of cities.

LATOYA RUBY FRAZIER

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LaToya Ruby Frazier

Editor's Note: Read The Atlantic's special coverage of Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy.

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, but his death reverberated across the United States.

Memphis did not feel the full flames of riots in April 1968, in part because of King's organizing apparatus. But his message of nonviolence was not enough to hold back the tide of rage that brought millions of dollars of damage to other major metropolises, including Chicago and Baltimore. King's assassination has influenced how these cities are physically structured, from the gutting of urban neighborhoods to the memorializing of the civil-rights leader in monuments, streets, and schools.

Using techniques and film formats associated with late-20th-century documentary photography, and shooting from a helicopter, LaToya Ruby Frazier revisited Memphis, Chicago, and Baltimore to explore how they have responded to five more decades of oppression.

Video: Aerial Justice



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Memphis



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The Memphis Pyramid (*above*), one of Tennessee's most famous buildings, over-looks the Hernando DeSoto Bridge across the Mississippi River. The bridge is an iconic symbol for Memphis, spanning the distance from Tennessee to Arkansas. That's why Black Lives Matter protesters shut it down in 2016, echoing **sanitation workers' demands in 1968** for economic justice and calling for an end to police brutality.

The Lorraine Motel, where King was assassinated, has since been reenvisioned as the National Civil Rights Museum, which preserves many of the exact details from the day of the murder. A Dodge and a Cadillac are parked in the lot below room 306 (*above*); a white wreath on the railing honors the room's most famous occupant (*below*). The assassin James Earl Ray shot King, who was standing on the balcony, from a flophouse bathroom across the street.

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Chicago

The structural inequality of Chicago, which King fought against in 1966, is striking even today. Just west of the Magnificent Mile and the towering skyscrapers of one of America's wealthiest neighborhoods marks the location where the Cabrini-Green public-housing projects once stood (*below*). Cabrini-Green is currently being re-developed. But in 1968, rage gripped the ghetto, and snipers reportedly fired on police from the towers.



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The New Greater St. John Community Missionary Baptist Church (*below*) still anchors a mostly black neighborhood in East Garfield Park, on the city's West Side.

King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference used the church, then known as Warren Avenue Congregational Church, as their headquarters during their Chicago campaign, building on the strong activist tradition on the West Side. Two years later, after King's death was announced, riots spilled down Madison Street, two blocks behind the church.

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The corner of East 41st Street and South Martin Luther King Drive (*below*), in Bronzeville, a neighborhood historically known as the “Black Metropolis” that has long been considered an economic and cultural hub of the black community on the South Side. In 1966, King led **sustained demonstrations against housing discrimination** around the city.



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During a march into the Gage Park neighborhood from Marquette Park (*above*), protesters were met by white counterprotesters, who pelted King with rocks. The Martin Luther King Jr. Living Memorial (*below*), commemorating the incident, was unveiled in Marquette Park in 2016.

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Baltimore



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On April 19, 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man, died from an injury suffered in police custody, sparking protests throughout the city. Murals in his honor were created near the Gilmor Homes (*above and below*), the public-housing project where he had been arrested.



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Disturbances occurred throughout the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood (*above*).

The 2015 **Baltimore Uprising** saw the city's most extensive protests since 1968's Holy Week Uprising. The 1968 disturbances started on the 400 block of Gay Street

(*above*), where a crowd of people had gathered on April 6. After the windows of a hat shop were smashed, fires and looting broke out along Gay Street.

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The CVS drugstore at the corner of North and Pennsylvania Avenues (*above*) was burned during the 2015 unrest.

The despair of 1968 left an indelible mark on Baltimore's history. As in Chicago, unrest in Baltimore's black neighborhoods cemented white flight to the suburbs and other parts of the city. The divestment and discriminatory lending practices—infamously associated with Baltimore—increased the segregation and deterioration of black neighborhoods, like the one where Freddie “Pepper” Gray grew up in poverty (*below*).



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