

Excerpt from “125th Street, Interrupted” text by Vicki Goldberg

Harlem has been, is, the dream of many and the nightmare too. In 2012, this fabled home of jazz and swing, mecca of blacks the world over, was redistricted, which meant that the mecca was no longer primarily black. The photographs in this book mark a moment that may look like now but could be many a time brimming with the past and verging on transformation...

125th: Time in Harlem is not a crusade but a contemplation, although Diggs and Hillel do say they want “to continue to believe that images make a difference in how we shape our future....”. The physical future of 125th Street is already on the march, and when it arrives, these photographs will testify visually to what has been gained and lost, but only inferentially to what has been gained, or more likely lost, to a community and a culture. Culture is a complex concept that embraces many elements beyond the visual spectrum, some of them embedded in history, some in habits, values, interactions, or simply in minds. Cameras alone cannot explain such things; the physical changes are obvious but the transformations, often subtle, that occur when place and populace shift, are of another order.

The larger context of these images of 125th Street hovers beyond their edges: in the projected life of this street and of greater Harlem lies a lesson, as yet untaught, for kindred places beckoning to developers and urban planners across the nation. Two men with a camera, thoughtfully observing the visual cacophony of one major thoroughfare and the complicated interplay of its history, its present, and the certainty of change, have laid the groundwork for a dialogue and a vision that reaches farther than human eyes can see.