

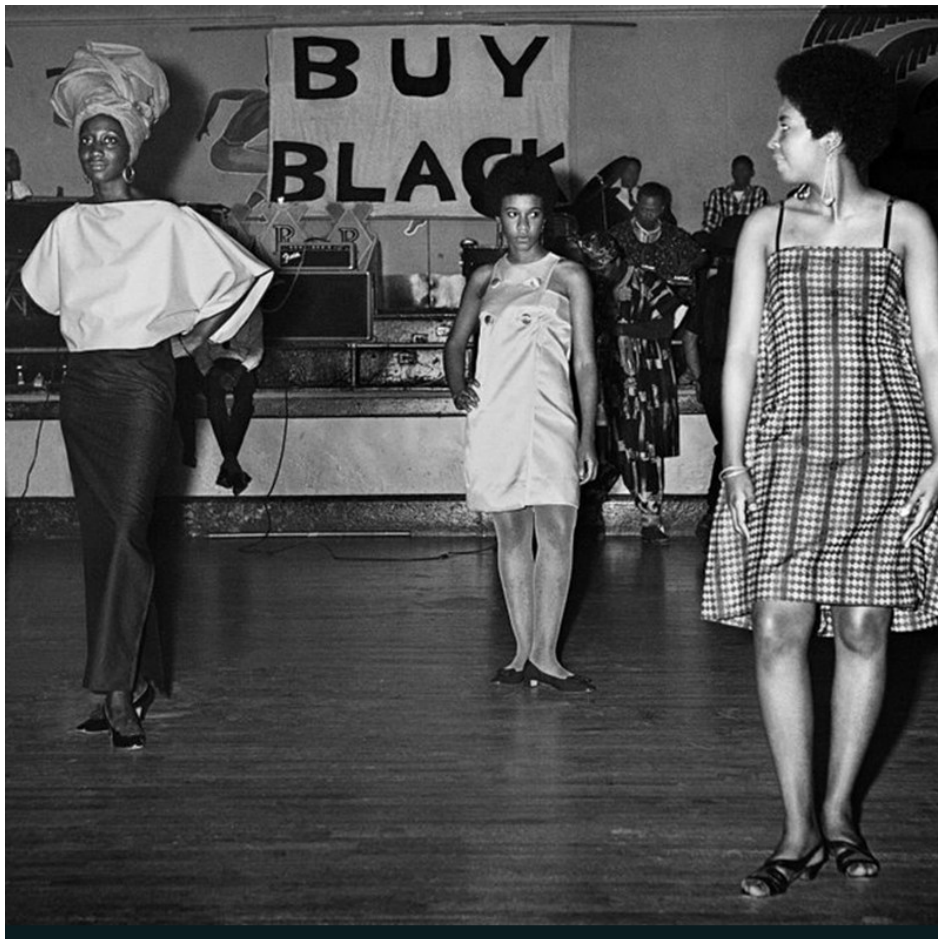
The Moguldom Nation

Kwame Brathwaite Photos Immortalized The 'Black Is Beautiful' Identity Movement. Here's Why They're Undergoing Resurgence



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Philip Martin Gallery

The term “erasure” and movements to defy it are among the hottest narratives today in the Black Vanguard. Bold voices and creative innovations are offering provocative moves that simply can’t be ignored.

Nia Martin-Robinson, director of Black Leadership and Engagement at Planned Parenthood, moderated a recent discussion at a Planned Parenthood event. The topic was “In Defense Of Black Women: Challenging Patriarchy And White Supremacy Through Movement And Media.”

“Anything you’re talking about, Black women are there,” Martin-Robinson said. “From politics to social reform to patriarchy, yet somehow we are left in the background or left out entirely. We all need to work together to change this, and we need to take the responsibility into our own hands.”

The image of Black women and the powerful photographs of Kwame Brathwaite were the subjects of a recent talk held by Hollywood agency UTA Fine Arts division and the photographer’s son. Brathwaite’s photographs have been exhibited in numerous notable galleries and formats from the Philip Martin Gallery to “Grey’s Anatomy.” He is most widely recognized for immortalizing the “Black Is Beautiful” movement through his photographs which were taken in Harlem and the Bronx in the late ’50s and throughout the ’60s.

The images challenged mainstream ideas of the standards of beauty and Black women. Brathwaite’s son, Kwame S. Brathwaite, has now decided to resurrect many of these images and drive new narratives around a discussion he sees as an important element of the trend around erasure taking place today.

“Brathwaite helped widen the narrow definition of beauty and reshape our country’s cultural standards,” said Arthur Lewis, creative director of UTA Fine Arts and UTA Artist Space. However, much of the ground is in jeopardy of being lost today in the current U.S. political climate.

Brathwaite’s goal is to use the images to educate people about the power of pictures and activism. “It is important to present our ideas to society. Our views are important and our bodies are important,” Kwame S. said during the discussion. He added that his father always made sure to capture a regal look to counteract the many disparaging images from the mainstream media of yesterday which still persist today.

Brathwaite’s images are experiencing so much of a resurgence that Rihanna used several of them to launch her new Fenty clothing line via LVMH. Rihanna shared the inspiration behind her debut fashion line, Fenty, with her Instagram and Twitter followers.

She used just three words: “Kwame Brathwaite. archive.”

It should not be surprising that such discussions are taking place among Black influencers. The rising trend of exploration around identity is front-and-center among individuals, demographics and our country.

For a demographic that out-indexes in usage and adoption, few seem to be aware of the impending technology of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its potential positive and detrimental impact on framing around identity. From facial recognition to virtual reality and 5G, emerging technology will be a massive force to reckon with as it pertains to identity — whether it's an error in identity, persistence and speed of negative images or immersion in stories that reveal identity.

What is needed now is greater intersection between culture and technology that is holistic and far-reaching. Otherwise, efforts will continue to move slowly or stall altogether. This is about psychosocial gaps more than anything and how silos exist on an industry level when it comes to this demographic — silos that do not exist nearly as much with their mainstream counterparts.

There is great opportunity, but only if the two begin to sync more and greater awareness is developed. This could just turn out to be one of the greatest challenges of our time and a crucial one to further define identity in a machine-driven era.