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Songs of My People: 25 Years Later, A PhotoNOLA Exhibition, Opens at Dillard University

NEW ORLEANS -- Brainfood, The Dillard University President's Lecture Series, presents "Songs of My People: 25 Years," an exhibition that shares the visions of 18 contemporary photographers including Jamel Shabazz, L. Kasimu Harris, D. Michael Cheers, Deborah Willis and Ruddy Roye. The exhibition runs from December 8 through January 12 at the Dillard University Art Gallery in the Cook Communications Center Room 106. The opening reception is Saturday, December 9 at 3 p.m., followed by a Curator's Talk at 4 p.m. Gallery hours are from noon to 6 p.m. This exhibition and is free and open to the public and a part of PhotoNOLA, an annual festival of photography in New Orleans.

"Many of the stories are the same, which on the one hand is disheartening," said Dr. Imani M. Cheers, an Assistant Professor of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University. Cheers was a child when she observed her father, Dr. D. Michael Cheers layout photos in their family home for the 1992 groundbreaking photo documentary project "Songs of My People." The work debuted to critical acclaim, featuring 50 African American photographers who collaborated to document life in Black America.

Cheers also saw her father co-edit, "Songs of My People: African Americans: A Self Portrait," with an introduction by Gordon Parks. Those 50 visual storytellers embarked on assignments to more accurately, document pertinent issues such as police brutality, unemployment, poverty, income inequality, and homelessness. Twenty five years later, Dr. Imani Cheers was moved to revisit those photojournalistic inquiries because many of the same issues are still present in black communities, despite progress.

"Police brutality is still terrorizing black communities 25 years later yet, politically we have elected the first African American President of the U.S. twice in the last 25 years," Cheers said. "So, we have made strides in many arenas and also remained stagnant in others."

Cheers selected a mix of African American photographers, digital and visual journalists to canvas their communities to address the same topics of "Songs of My People," such as who are the everyday, ordinary people doing extraordinary things in the Black community and what challenges still plague our communities? Imani Cheers' iteration of the exhibition debuted earlier this year at Gallery 102, on the campus of George Washington

University. Cheers said she's excited to show the work in New Orleans, particularly at Dillard University, where she was once a fellow in The New York Times Student Journalism Institute.

"New Orleans is one of my favorite cities in the world specifically because of the rich culture, art, music and history. It was incredibly important to bring the exhibition to this iconic city and to host it at Dillard University," Cheers said. "We are honored and extremely excited to showcase this work with the city."

Exhibition Information

Show hours on **Friday, December 8** from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturday, December 9, noon to 6 p.m.

The reception starts at 3 p.m., and the Curator's Talk with Dr. Imani M. Cheers and L. Kasimu Harris at 4 p.m.

Tuesday through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The show is closed from **December 24 to 31**

And the show closes on **January 12**

For appointments or inquiries, please contact John Barnes at jbarnes@dillard.edu or L. Kasimu Harris at 504-416-5519.

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Dillard University, located in New Orleans, Louisiana, is a private four-year liberal arts historically black institution with a history dating back to 1869. The University's signature programs includes Physics and Film. For more information, please visit us at www.dillard.edu and follow us on Twitter, Facebook at @DU1869, and Instagram: Dillard University.