

Those Who Stood Up

Accra Shepp

Photographs from Columbia's Gaza Solidarity Encampment

May 21, 2024



Accra Shepp
Anonymous, 2024

I photographed Occupy Wall Street for a year, from 2011 to 2012. Nearly ten years later, as part of my work documenting the Covid-19 pandemic, I followed the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2020. It was never my intent to focus on social justice, and I continue to

make more experimental images. But paying attention to culture—which is to say people—is the work of everyone in the arts, and my intentions had to bend to the reality around me, around all of us. Last month, when students at universities around the country began setting up encampments to protest the war in Gaza, I came to realize that I would need to make this new moment visible. I spent five days photographing the protests at Columbia University, in the eight days between the first wave of arrests there and the next.

I am proud of the students for leading us in confronting our participation in this war. At the same time, it saddens me that the culture of surveillance has frightened us, frightened those who stand up to be heard yet are afraid to be seen. As someone who sees for a living, I would make visible all who stood up, particularly those who stood up for peace and against violence. It is a terrible paradox. Those who could not participate in the publication of their images today have acknowledged to me how much they have to lose: there have been firings, suspensions, expulsions, even death threats. Yet they allowed me to photograph them and trusted me. For now their images have to remain private, but they will be seen another day.

It also troubles me that the protest I photographed is not the protest I see reported by most of the mainstream media. I saw no embrace of antisemitism. On the contrary, the number of Jewish protesters was impossible to ignore, as was the level of cooperation between Jews and Muslims. The image of the thing, even in this moment of media saturation, retains its power. The photograph—the record of this protest against the killings—is difficult to erase from the mind. It speaks to our hunger to know the world.



Accra Shepp
Abbi, 2024

Abbi: I came to the encampment in solidarity with Columbia students, faculty, and workers who are calling on their institutions to divest from Israeli apartheid and the genocide in Gaza. Showing up at an organized protest is the most rational response to the unfathomable violence against Palestinians and the most direct way to express grief, anger, and radical optimism.



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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 2024

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, University Professor: I speak as best I can for all concerned faculty teaching qualitative material. There may still be time to undo the harm being done to our students by administrators, donors, and trustees with little experience of teaching, who think of the university as real estate and of the great United States tradition of civil disobedience as civic disruption to be punished by police and expulsion. As one of our colleagues remarked: “expelling principled and engaged students will come at a cost to the university that we cannot calculate.” After 1968 some students were suspended, not expelled. Many returned to complete their degrees and went on to be a credit to the university: Ben Jealous came back to be a Rhodes Scholar, then to direct first the NAACP and now the Sierra Club. Speaking as an old teacher with many decades of experience, let me say: Please, Columbia, do not deal a massive blow to the still-admirable US university system, and thus to the country at large, by thoughtlessly expelling students.



Accra Shepp
Anonymous, 2024



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Anonymous, 2024

Anonymous: Student protest has been fundamental to the maintenance of human and civil rights in this country and beyond. Our colleges and universities have shown themselves to put profit first, humanity last.



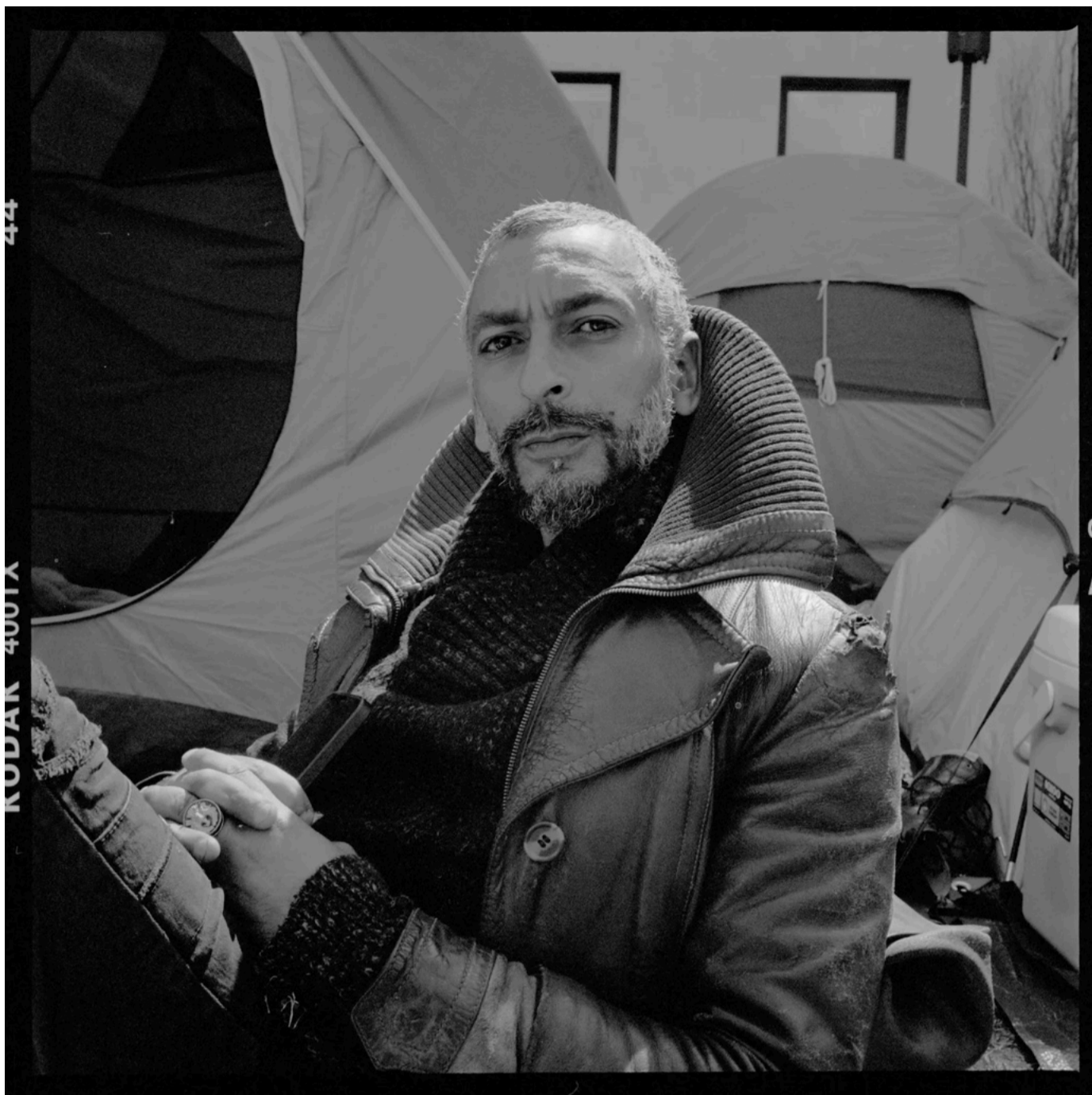
Accra Shepp

Anonymous, 2024



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Lily and Ray, 2024

Ray, Barnard Student: As we celebrate the season of liberation, it is important to remember that freedom for some is not enough.



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Mohamed Abdou, 2024

Mohamed Abdou, visiting professor: I was hired by Columbia in May 2023 to teach courses on 1492, Islam, anarchism, comparative settler-colonialism in Israel and North America, and abolition, queerness, and feminism in the Global South. The recent House hearings—during which I was transformed from an intellectual-organizer hired for my interdisciplinary expertise into a public enemy—made clear that those in power, from congresspeople to the president of Columbia, Baroness Minouche Shafik, are architects of animosity. They benefit from strife and the weaponization of our current moment to magnify our disagreements at the expense of what brings us together. The last eight years, meanwhile, demonstrate how white supremacist media platforms and personalities can be simultaneously anti-Jewish and supportive of Zionism. We should be able to live in a world together with faith or lack of faith, where we can have dialogues to mitigate our disagreements, and for the sake of our children we must be able to build that better world.



Accra Shepp
M. H., 2024

M. H., chemical engineering student: If you look closely, you can see my grandmother's wedding ring on my neck. She was one of the loudest voices for Irish liberation during the Troubles; it felt necessary for me to speak for Palestinian liberation in the same manner.



Accra Shepp
Anonymous, 2024



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Naib and Bina, 2024

Naib and Bina, writers: *The New York War Crimes* is a movement paper designed both to critique our media—exemplified by *The New York Times*, which manufactures consent for genocide—and to publish the truths they won't: the names of the Palestinian victims, the voices of Palestinian prisoners, of the student movement, of workers organizing for Palestine.



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Anonymous, 2024

Anonymous: As a Columbia University staff member, I believe it is my role not only to protest the administration's militarization and police occupation of our campus but also to stand alongside the brave students and demand what is just: the university's divestment from the settler-colonial Zionist state committing apartheid, occupation, and genocide against the Palestinian people.



Accra Shepp
D. J., 2024

D. J.: We cannot look away from children being killed, a nation of people being exterminated, a world being burned to the ground. They are our children, our people, our world, and we are complicit. No one is coming to save us but ourselves. Free Palestine forever.



Accra Shepp
Unidentified police officer, 2024



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Anonymous: The student protests at Columbia were started because of the egregious violations of human rights occurring in Gaza right now, which have been funded in part by our university. Despite the horrific cause that brought us together, Columbia students have created a community filled with hope, education, art, and care. While we are disappointed in our university, this sense of community among students has only grown, both on campus and globally, as students continue to set up encampments in solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is an honor to be their peers.

Accra Shepp

Accra Shepp is a New York—based artist and writer. His images have been collected and exhibited globally and he has just completed a Cullman Scholars Fellowship working on his project, *The Islands of New York*.