Draft May 11, 2022

Emory Douglas Documentary

“There is Man Who” working title

We think we know them. We think we’ve heard the anger and the cry of the Black Panthers. We might be convinced of the justifiable call for their 10-point platform. We might even be able to point out the particular ways they claimed connection and attention through leathered, radicalism, formations of synchronized movement, and hair that defied, well everything reeking white supremacy. And yes, they spoke affirmations of pride while feeding children, educated while dodging bullets, and laid in wait and in jails to testify, not only for their innocence – in most cases – but to the historical atrocities that gave them reason to call out, to bear arms, and to set the foundation for some social services that everyone benefits from today. Even now, a new generation feels their anguish and adamant push for our quality of life, and has absorbed and adopted both the style of his art and the determined language it evokes in order to take long held demands further than COINTELPRO previously allowed.

And yet, what do we know of them in light of their becoming? What aspects of their childhood and exposure brought to bear the sacrifices and contributions they would ultimately make for all of us? Perhaps most importantly, what grew the radical love in them that gave rise to their giving of themselves – body and soul – and especially and including a willingness to die to end the racism and its’ tools ~~that were killing many of us~~.

Emory Douglas, as both part of the rank and file as well as the visionary who gave the Black Panther’s their visual identity and truth-telling, framework, is as profound an artist as we’ve known. He gave greater meaning to the ways in which the Black Panther’s presented themselves. He transformed an era that identified revolution by the hearts and hands of the power in people, and, in so doing, set the stage and standards for sister/brother social justice movements. In the work of an artist is both the imagination and a mindset, and in Douglass’ case an inspired, singular *seeing* for a collective knowing. So effective an artist, he arrested the master narratives used to demean us, those used to deem us deserving of violence, and those that subjected us to institutional, and thereby, economic choke holds, and, instead, he injected a truth of our humanity – both complex and complete – that reflected our cultural legacy and with equanimity birthed more of the same.

So, who is this man? This artist who found a way around the so-called televised revolution, and into an even more impactful, longstanding telling. Drawing from a retrospective of his work, where else will his full story lead us? Douglas’ art signifies a distinguished and declarative statement of our freedom. Surely it must be illuminated.

“The Was a Man Who” will claim the company of other cultural archives as:

*I am Not Your Negro*

*Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*

*What Happened: Miss Nina Simone*

*Summer of Soul*

*4 Little Girls*