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EXCLUSIVE - THE MEAN STREETS OF 1980S BUSHWICK: BLOCKS OF  
BURNED OUT BUILDINGS AND PILES OF GARBAGE CAPTURED BY  
PHOTOGRAPHER WHO WORKED AT A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE BROOKLYN  
NEIGHBORHOOD DURING A TIME OF ROCKETING CRIME RATES

- Photographer Meryl Meisler captured hundreds of images showing Bushwick during the 1980s when Brooklyn struggled with high crime rates
- At the time, she was teaching in Bushwick and captured images along the way during her commute
- She said: 'It was not the destination that it is today... The neighborhood did shock me, you know, I was really surprised to walk out to see what I saw'

By Regina F. Graham – October 17, 2018



Dozens of abandoned buildings, piles of bricks, drug paraphernalia and trash could often be found block after block during the 1980s in Brooklyn's neighborhood of Bushwick. It was the norm; this was the period when crack was king.

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Certain areas of Bushwick along with neighboring communities of East New York and Cypress Hills were dubbed a 'KILLING GROUND' in a New York Post front page story as it was reported that at least one person was murdered every 63 hours.

It took years for city officials and police officers to clean up the streets, and now those communities are hipster havens filled with pricey real estate and a variety of eateries to dine at.

Renowned photographer Meryl Meisler captured hundreds of images showcasing both urban decay and also how residents thrived among the destruction in 1980s Bushwick. Her photos of the popular neighborhood are showcased within her book, *A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick*.

Speaking to DailyMail.com, Meisler, who taught at Bushwick Public School during the time, said: 'It was not the destination that it is today... The neighborhood did shock me, you know, I was really surprised to walk out to see what I saw.'

'There were so many abandoned and closed up buildings and burned out areas. And the school had a lot of challenges too. There were hanging wires ... a lot of the rooms didn't have windows, depending on air conditioning that was not dependable.'

Among the numerous rundown buildings and demolition sites, Meisler also managed to capture dozens of photos showing how residents lived among the turmoil.

'I started seeing things, like how kids were just being kids and playing on the street, having fun, being with their friends,' she recalled. 'I only took photographed things that I found positive. ... Family's hanging out, going on with life as normal.'

'I didn't photograph crack vials on the ground or hypodermic needles or people strung out. I photographed positive things... and I always found the neighborhood of Bushwick very warm and welcoming and non-threatening. Nothing ever happened to me.'

'My thought is that this not totally true for everyone else. And there were incidents, there were dead bodies sometimes. But I was very lucky.'

Among the hundreds of images she captured of Bushwick, several show children playing unaccompanied by adults on the street, which is something that has changed with the times in today's society, she remarked.

'What's different nowadays I would say about photographing is kids on the street because you don't see children unaccompanied as much on the street playing. The world has changed, especially in New York City,' Meisler reflected before mentioning how six-year-old Etan Patz disappeared on his way to his school bus stop in the SoHo neighborhood of Lower Manhattan in 1979 becoming one of the biggest criminal cases to rock the country.

One image Meisler captured shows a young father helping his son with his homework while riding the bus in the neighborhood.

'People are people, most parents want the best for their children and helping them do their homework on the bus was just such a sweet moment. It's iconic,' the photographer stated of the image.

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Another photo she captured shows a group of teen girls sitting together during a subway train ride as the walls are covered in graffiti.

Meisler also captured an image showing a former student dressed beautifully in all red on her graduation day from eighth grade.

'I was so proud of her... she projected confidence and energy and excitement on that day,' Meisler recalled.

Meisler's captivating and striking images of Bushwick are the largest known documentation of the neighborhood during the 1980s.

A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick also includes disco images and accounts from historians, educators and Disco Divas.

She is also the author of Purgatory & Paradise: Sassy 70s Suburbia & the City, which includes photos from Fire Island, Studio 54 and the Lower East Side.