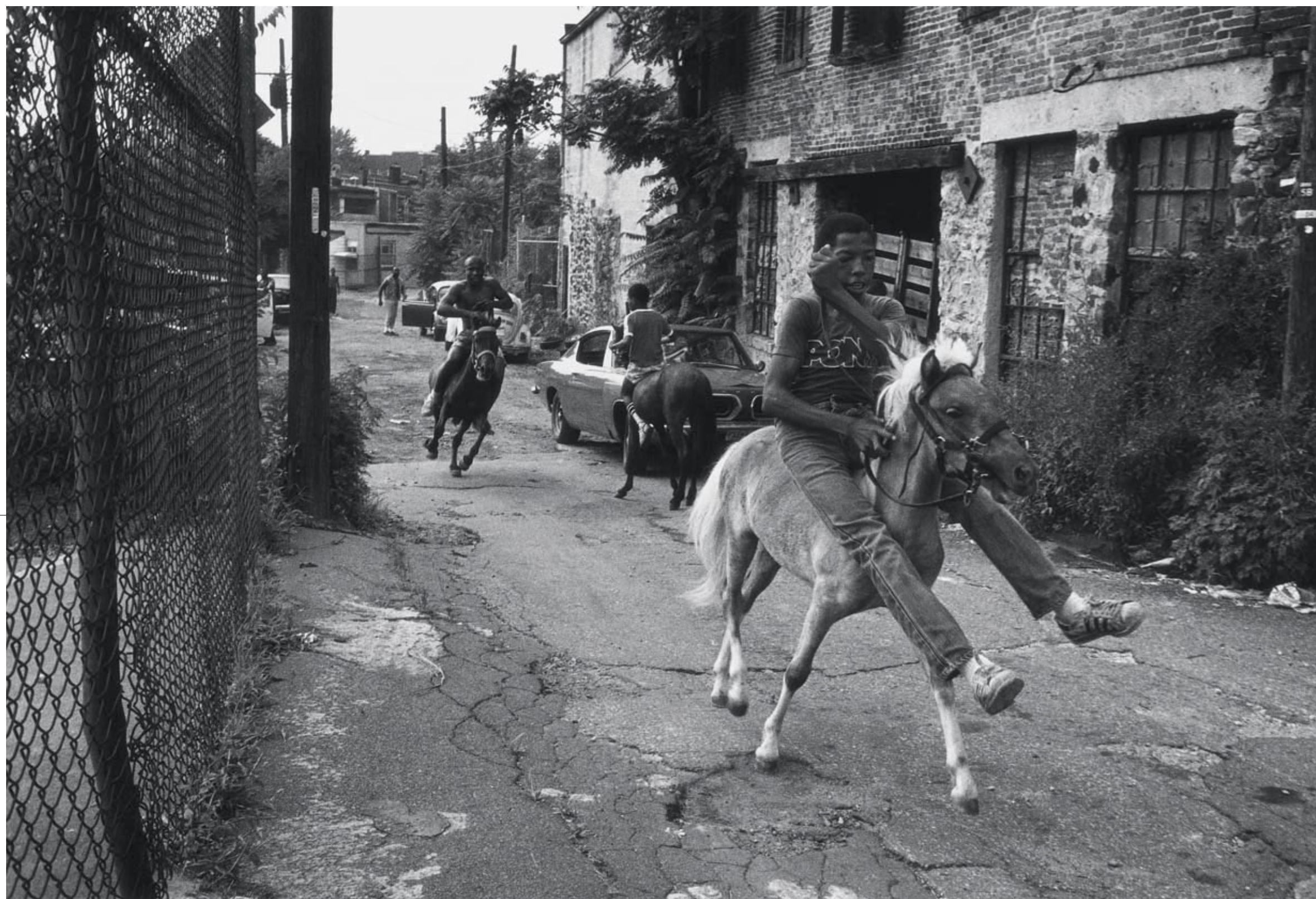


AMIDST THE
CHAOS OF THE
1980'S, THE
**BOYS OF
BALTIMORE**
RODE HIGH

**RETREAT
STREET**

PHOTOGRAPHY ROBIN SCHWARTZ STORY CHRISTOPHER JAMES RICHTER







In the late 1980s, New Jersey-based photographer Robin Schwartz spent her weekends driving to Baltimore to document functioning horse stables in the city. She was drawn to two stables in particular: the Retreat Street Stables, where the men who kept the stables allowed boys and teenagers to hang out, and the Calhoun Stables, which held some of the city's remaining arabbers and their equipment. While the term arabber refers to a merchant who walks along a horse-driven cart selling fruits and vegetables, Schwartz's focus was—as with the majority of her work—the animals and their relationship to the people surrounding them. “I never knew my grandfather very well,” Schwartz says. “He died when I was seven, but I remember him. He never drove a car—he rode a horse and wagon. There were always wagon parts around the house when I was younger, so this was kind of revisiting my past.”

Nestled in between bus stops and apartment complexes, the horse stables provided a men's club of sorts for those who kept black and white spotted mares, small brown ponies and often a surrogate family of barnyard strays. Young boys around nine and ten years old hung around the stables and did chores in exchange for riding lessons, while the teenagers saved money to purchase their own horses for about four hundred dollars. They would ride them bareback on city streets alongside buses and parked cars, and when the adults went to work, the boys would race the ponies down back alleys. “They cared for their horses the way boys care for their cars, but it was more than that,” says Schwartz. “The horses were pets—something that loves you back.”

Although as a white woman Schwartz was an outsider on two counts, she recognized the respect the men and boys had for the animals, and after showing them some of her work (which includes photos of monkeys and pitbulls) she was welcomed to hang around as an “honorary boy.” Schwartz's goal was not to document the socio-political implications of the stables—by her own account she was oblivious to most of the social, racial and economic tension around her—but what the stables provided for the impressionable young men was nevertheless evident. In a rustbelt city that was in the throes of epidemic violence, the stables were a place that instilled compassion and responsibility; as Schwartz puts it, “it's not easy to take care of a horse.” Although there were once some 65 arabber stables in Baltimore, by 1987 there were only five. Today the Retreat Street Stables survive with the help of the Arabber Preservation Society and are currently undergoing restorations. **F**

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PHOTOGRAPHY ROBIN SCHWARTZ



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