

Audrey Cooper
Managing Editor

To the Judges:

Year after year, black male teenagers in Oakland, California, have failed in school, on the streets and in life, at an alarming rate. Yet at some point, the community became numb to the numbers. They were predictable. And the children they represented had become invisible.

The San Francisco Chronicle laid bare a new statistic: The number of African American males killed in Oakland mirrored the number of young black men graduating from high schools qualified to attend a state university.

Against this backdrop of failure and death, school officials in Oakland became the first in the nation to create an independent task force with the sole focus of helping African American males navigate the challenges of their surroundings. The group sponsored a charter school specifically for black young men, called the 100 Black Men Community Charter School, with the twin goals of keep these youngsters alive and educate them.

Over the past year, photographer Lacy Atkins implanted herself in this school's hallways, classrooms and playgrounds, documenting daily life for the children, teachers and families within the boundaries of the school grounds. What emerged was a portrait of these people – children who desperately want to learn, teachers who struggle with keeping their hope alive and families who have nowhere else to turn for their children's education.

Whether shooting a photograph of two siblings beating each other up on the playground, finding a quiet image of a tattered shirt cuff covered in dirt or capturing a hungry child licking the last remnants from his school breakfast plate, Atkins been able to show the readers of the San Francisco Chronicle, both online and in print, what reality is like for these children.

We are proud to nominate Atkins for a Pulitzer Prize in feature photography.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Audrey Cooper