A Teacher’s Guide
To selected works from the exhibition

reflections in Black

Smithsonian African American Photography
Reflections in Black: Smithsonian African American Photography

A Teacher’s Guide

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This exhibition is organized by the Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution, and circulated by Curatorial Assistance, Pasadena, California. Presented by Gaylord Hotel.
Reflections in Black: Smithsonian African American Photography

This exhibition presents over 330 photographs and photo-based works of art produced by black photographers throughout the 150-year history of the medium. The works in the exhibition form a technical history of photography—from daguerreotypes and tintypes to contemporary photomontages and computer-based works—as well as a pictorial history of African American experiences.

This Teacher’s Guide will prepare teachers and their students to visit this exhibition, and will serve as a follow-up study. Corresponding with the thematic sections of the exhibition, the lessons in this Teacher’s Guide examine how, throughout history, black photographers have played a central role in influencing the ways in which African Americans visualize themselves.

The First One Hundred Years, 1842–1942, explores the importance of photography in creating a sense of community identity and preserving family histories.

Art and Activism considers the capacity of photography to reveal the beauty and power of the African American cultural experience, while documenting and affecting social change.

A History Deconstructed investigates the use of the photographic image as a primary tool in the aesthetic investigation of personal and racial history.

Each section includes two lessons that focus on one or two photographs from the exhibition as they relate to a significant period or event in American history. An introduction to each section includes a series of questions designed to encourage students to look closely at the photographs and to share their initial responses. The following lessons contain information on the time period, photographer, and subject matter (“Narrative”) that can be incorporated into discussion or provided as reading assignments for older students, and a concluding activity (“Creative Response”). At the end of the unit is a vocabulary key, artist biographies, a list of related works for the classroom, and instructions for scheduling your visit if you have not already done so.
The First One Hundred Years, 1842 – 1942

African Americans were among the pioneers in the medium of photography. Jules Lion, James Presley Ball, and Augustus Washington began producing daguerreotypes in the early 1840s, a few years after the invention of the process. Using their work as a starting point, this section follows the development of African American photography through its first one hundred years. At the forefront of photographic technology, the artists included in this section immediately understood the new medium’s power to create a comprehensive visual legacy and to provide support for enlightened social philosophies. African Americans used photography to establish a collective identity, from early portraiture of free persons of color, through photography’s fundamental role in the creation of the “New Negro” ideal, to its use in documentary and journalistic work. Encompassing images of families, events, human rights activists, and cultural expressions such as the Harlem community of the 1920s and 1930s, this section chronicles African Americans’ use of photography as a means of creating and communicating their personal and social dignity.

The following lessons explore the importance of photography in creating a sense of community identity and preserving family histories. As you look at each of the photographs, consider the following:

- Why do you think this photograph was taken?
- For whom was it taken? Who was supposed to see it?
- Where was it taken? How can you tell?
- In what time period was the photograph made? Why do you think that?
- What occasion does this photograph document, if any? How can you tell?
- Do you think it is a candid or posed (staged) portrait? What clues led to your answer?
- What do the clothes and other objects in the photograph say about the sitter’s position in society?
- What might the artist have wanted to communicate through each image?
The First One Hundred Years, 1842 – 1942

Photography’s Beginnings

In 1839, Louis J. M. Daguerre invented a device that could produce an image on an iodized copper plate. He called his invention the daguerreotype and published an instruction manual for the process within the year. Daguerreotypes and other early photographic processes caused great excitement throughout Europe and the United States. Entrepreneurs and the public alike quickly realized the potential of photography, especially for portraits. Until photography came along, only the wealthy could afford to have their likenesses made, by sitting for a portrait painter.

J.P. (James Presley) Ball (1825-1905) & Son

*Vignette (scroll) portrait of an unidentified black woman*
Original albumen cabinet card, ca. 1890s; modern print, 1999
Montana Historical Society, Helena
957-608

Narrative:

During the 1840s, photography’s first decade, James Presley Ball was among the fifty documented daguerreotypists to open successful galleries in American cities. Initially, Ball worked as a traveling daguerreotypist, a trade common in the early days of photography, before settling for a time in such cities as Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and Helena, Montana. In each of these places, he established prosperous studios, photographing people from all walks of life.

Ball kept up with the latest technical advances in photography, adapting quickly as changes occurred. By the end of the 1850s, daguerreotypes and other previous formats that required the use of metal plates were being replaced by paper prints. The first commercially successful print of this type was the albumen print. Developed on very thin paper, the albumen print was then mounted on a stiff card for support. Small card portraits, measuring only 2 ¼” x 3 ½”, were called carte-de-visites or “visiting cards.” The cabinet card, a slightly larger version of the carte-de-visite, gained popularity in the 1870s. The larger format of the cabinet card allowed photographers to become more creative, giving greater attention to lighting and background and the way in which the subject was posed.

Ball’s portrait of an unidentified young black woman is typical of cabinet cards produced in the late 1800s. Pictured in a high-necked dress with a decorated beaded bodice, the young woman’s image was superimposed on a scroll and set against a dark background. Text printed below the portrait identified and advertised the photographer, J.P. Ball and Son, and the studio’s location. As with most portrait photographs made in the nineteenth century, it is not likely that this image was intended for publication or public presentation. Individuals merely wanted to have their likenesses preserved for future generations or for loved ones.

Creative Response:

Create a special card with your photograph on it to be given to someone you care about. What types of things would you include on this card?
The First One Hundred Years, 1842 – 1942

The New Negro Image

From 1900 to 1940, African American artists, educators, historians, and philosophers were recognized nationally for their creative endeavors and accomplishments. It was a period defined as the time of the “New Negro.” As this new black intellectual society emerged, photographers began photographing the artistic and political leaders of their communities. Their images reflect people who were proud, self-reliant, and demanded full citizenship rights.

Undermining the New Negro movement during this period were postcards, advertisements, and popular culture artifacts of African Americans produced by the dominating white culture, which were crude and racist. Black photographers played an essential role in countering this negative stereotyping of black society. They contradicted these depictions by making portraits that celebrated individual achievement and established a counter image that conveyed a sense of identity and self-worth.

Addison N. Scurlock (1883-1964)

Wedding couple portrait
Gelatin silver print, ca. 1920
Dr. James K. Hill Collection, Washington, D.C.

Addison N. Scurlock (1883-1964)

Wedding couple portrait
Gelatin silver print, ca. 1920
Dr. James K. Hill Collection, Washington, D.C.

Narrative:

In the early 1900s, the city of Washington boasted a thriving black community of churches, schools, businesses, and a wide range of African American cultural institutions. Addison Scurlock was in the center of the activity, photographing social and political events as well as Washington’s black educators, entertainers, and politicians.

Portrait photography was Scurlock’s specialty. Of the thousands of photographs he made, his portraits were most valued and recognized. His mastery of studio lighting gave his photographs a look all their own. The “Scurlock look,” as it was called, referred to a portrait in which there were no unsightly shadows, and where soft lighting evenly illuminated the features of the face. Aside from being skillfully composed and technically accomplished, perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of his work was his ability to portray all of his subjects as being above the ordinary.

Like most early photographs, Scurlock’s Wedding Couple Portrait was taken to commemorate a special occasion in the sitters’ life. Poised and dignified, the young couple exemplifies the New Negro image. They represent a distinguished society, proud of its high standards, traditions, and institutions.

Creative Response:

Pretend you are a portrait photographer, and pose a classmate to look proud and dignified. Choose props, postures, and expressions that will help achieve your goal.
## The First One Hundred Years, 1842 – 1942

### The New Negro Image

Before and during the First World War, large numbers of black Americans migrated from the rural South to industrial cities of the North looking for good jobs and opportunities to improve their lives. Many settled in New York City’s Harlem neighborhood where they found employment as well as a thriving black cultural life and intellectual community. Harlem’s talented black authors, playwrights, artists, and musicians drew national attention to this prosperous black community. A period of literary and intellectual flowering in the 1920s and 1930s fostered a new black cultural identity and became known as the Harlem Renaissance.

**Image not available**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>James VanDerZee (1886-1983)</th>
<th>A Harlem couple wearing raccoon coats standing next to a Cadillac on West 127th Street</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gelatin silver print, 1932</td>
<td>Courtesy of Donna Mussenden VanDerZee, New York, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>© 1998 all rights reserved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Narrative:**

Largely a self-taught photographer, James VanDerZee captured the spirit and life of New York City’s Harlem for more than sixty years. His photographs from the 1920s and 1930s show Harlem's socialites, politicians, religious leaders, and families, as well as social events like weddings and funerals. They remain some of the best and most comprehensive documents of life in Harlem during its cultural renaissance.

VanDerZee’s photograph of a Harlem couple portrays a fashionable man and woman dressed in expensive fur coats. The man sits in the Cadillac while the woman stands nearby, gazing at the camera. The sleek curves and shiny lines of the car fill the picture frame, and the open door seems to invite the viewer in. This image of African American material success implies that the migrant’s northern experience has been positive and productive. It depicts pride, achievement, and ownership.

VanDerZee’s photographs exemplify the Pictorialist aesthetic, the dominant mode of photography at the time, in which photographers produced soft-focused impressionistic images that were intended to beautify and idealize the subject. Despite their romanticism, VanDerZee’s photographs reflected the political and social upheaval of the early twentieth century. His images define a people and culture in transition and reveal their subjects’ sense of identity and self-awareness.

**Creative Response:**

Photographs can tell a story about people and their communities. Look closely at the photograph above paying attention to the couple’s clothing, posture, facial expressions, and location. Then, write about the story you think this picture tells.

Interview a classmate (preferably someone you don’t know very well) to find out his or her interests and hobbies, noting also the characteristics that make that person unique. Using what you’ve learned, create a portrait that tells a story about the person you interviewed.

*This image not available in teacher reproductions.*
Art and Activism

African American photographers were instrumental in motivating cultural change and defining the significance of the civil rights and black power movements in the late 1950s and 1960s. Marches, meetings, rallies, and leading figures such as Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are seen in this section through the eyes of the leading documentary photographers of the day. This was also a time when many African American photographers began to place themselves within the greater context of a worldwide African diaspora, understanding the American civil rights movement as part of a much larger and older struggle for independence and equal rights. Concurrent with this rise in black consciousness, photographers employed new artistic approaches to move beyond the traditional goal of objective reporting. They used the power of narrative and metaphor to expand the awareness of the public, combating the negative stereotyping found in mainstream media culture. During this invigorating time, photographers sought to be “graphic historians,” creating a collective biography of the African American people that would empower them in their struggle for civil rights, while at the same time providing evidence of the diversity of their individual histories, values, and goals.

The following lessons examine the capacity of photography to reveal the beauty and power of the African American cultural experience, while documenting and affecting social change. As you look at each of the photographs, consider the following:

- What sort of response do you think the photographer wanted you to have?
- What group, event, issue, or community is shown?
- What do you learn about it in the photograph?
- What story might the photograph be telling?
- What details in the photograph help tell the story?
- Who is in the picture? What can you say about the person(s) pictured?
- Where do you think the photographer was standing when he took this picture? How does the view/angle affect you as the viewer?
- How did the photographer “frame” or crop the picture? What is included/left out?
- What might the photographer have wanted to communicate with each image?
Art and Activism

Social and Political Movements

During the first half of the twentieth century, segregation was practiced in most areas of America, especially in the South. Many of the laws at the time maintained a separation of races, prohibiting blacks and whites from attending the same school or eating at the same table in a restaurant. African Americans were also prevented from voting, giving them no voice in the election of the officials who passed laws governing their lives. During the 1950s and 1960s, black leaders used the press, the court system, mass marches, demonstrations, and other forms of nonviolent resistance to challenge segregation and the laws that maintained it. These efforts came to be known as the Civil Rights Movement.

Jack T. Franklin (b. 1922)

Crowd scene, March on Washington
Gelatin silver print, 1963
Jack T. Franklin Collection
Courtesy of the African American Museum in Philadelphia

Narrative:

During the 1950s and 1960s, Jack T. Franklin worked as a staff and freelance photographer for black newspapers documenting the political turmoil of the period, including such events as the March on Washington and the Selma to Montgomery March.

In May of 1963, President John F. Kennedy sent a civil rights bill to Congress to end segregation in public facilities. The national civil rights leadership decided to pressure both the Kennedy administration and Congress to pass the civil rights legislation by holding a March on Washington. On August 28, 1963, nearly 250,000 people from almost every state gathered at the Lincoln Memorial for the March on Washington. The huge audience heard many speakers and singers throughout the day. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to the podium, the crowd responded with great emotion. His closing address, “I Have a Dream,” became instantly famous and remains one of the great moments in modern oratory. The march was a great success. A powerful message of love, peace, and strength was delivered that day.

Media coverage for the March on Washington was more extensive than for any previous political demonstration in U.S. history. News agencies sent large crews of reporters and photographers. Their photographs captured celebrities, politicians, and the masses of people participating in the event. Leading newspapers in many countries ran the story on their front pages. It was also one of the first events to be broadcast live around the world.

Creative Response:

Write your own speech titled “I Have a Dream” that expresses your dreams for America today.
Art and Activism

Social and Political Movements

The March on Washington did not immediately improve conditions for black Americans. Determined to keep things as they were, segregationists in the South became more violent, but civil rights activists stood their ground. As African Americans continued to demonstrate, media coverage increased, allowing the rest of the country and the world to witness the injustices of a racially divided society.

Narrative:

Shortly after President Lyndon B. Johnson pushed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through Congress, Dr. King and other leaders shifted their focus from the desegregation of public places to voting rights. Centered in Selma, Alabama, the Alabama Project was a major campaign to secure effective federal protection of voting rights. When protests at the local courthouse were unsuccessful, Dr. King announced there would be a 54-mile march from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery. On March 7, 1965, protesters marched out of Selma and over the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where they came face to face with the sheriff and more than fifty state troopers armed with clubs, whips, and gas masks. That day, ABC television interrupted a prime time broadcast to air footage from Selma of state troopers beating peaceful marchers. It became known as “Bloody Sunday.”

The events in Selma, recorded by the newspapers and television, affected the entire country. People from all over America rushed to Selma to march alongside black demonstrators. On Sunday, March 21, 1965, a second march from Selma to Montgomery began. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., leading more than two thousand marchers and protected by three thousand federal troops and United States helicopters, left Selma on a historic five-day march. For five days the eyes of the nation were once again focused on the South.

Jack Franklin was among the many photographers present at this momentous occasion. His photograph captured Dr. King, with wife Coretta by his side, as they marched from Selma to Montgomery. Just a few months later, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed, granting all black citizens the right to vote.

Creative Response:

Jack Franklin took not one but numerous photographs of events during the Civil Rights Movement. Choose a topic of interest to you that will be the subject of your own documentary project, presented in the form of a photo essay or a series of drawings if a camera is not available.
As the civil rights struggle continued into the 1960s, African Americans became increasingly frustrated with the police brutality that often resulted from peaceful demonstrations. Many began to reject the more passive civil rights strategies, vowing that they would “never take a beating without hitting back.” The Black Power Movement was led by young militants who felt nonviolent protests were incapable of achieving their goals.

Jonathan Eubanks (b. 1927)

*Black Panther party member carrying “Free Huey” flag, Oakland*

Gelatin silver print, 1969

Courtesy of the photographer, Oakland, California

Narrative:

Jonathan Eubanks, of Oakland, California, focused his camera on the activities of the Black Panther party. Founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was formed to combat police brutality in African American communities. Supporting the Black Power movement, which stressed racial dignity and self-reliance, the Black Panthers publicly advocated armed revolt and the flamboyant display of firearms. Their aggressive speeches and military actions, including several shoot-outs with the police, quickly attracted the media’s attention.

A visual chronicler of the party’s activities, Eubanks employed a documentary style that is both emotional and descriptive. His photographs explore the personal world of the party leaders and members. In the photograph above, Eubanks depicted a party member campaigning for the release of Huey Newton, who was arrested in 1967 for killing an Oakland police officer. Mysterious events surrounding the killing led the Black Panthers to believe that Newton was a victim of police efforts to destroy the party so they began a campaign to “Free Huey.” After a heavily publicized trial, Newton was convicted of manslaughter and sent to prison, where he remained until the conviction was reversed by a unanimous decision of the California State of Appeals. Upon his release in 1970, Newton attempted to revive the party by promoting community service and discouraging confrontations with police. Under his direction, the Black Panther Party established free breakfast programs for school children and ran free medical clinics. However, Newton’s efforts to redirect the group’s focus did not prevent external attacks, and the internal conflicts increased. The party broke up in 1972.

Creative Response:

A photograph “freezes” a moment in time. It is the photographer’s job to recognize the best moments, often attempting to capture a single image that suggests a much larger story. Next time you are in a big group of people (maybe on the playground or at an athletic event), pretend you are a photographer. Using your hands as a *viewfinder*, frame several pictures, trying to find one image that hints at a much larger story.
### Art and Activism

#### Artistic Movements

The Black Arts Movement, also called the Black Aesthetics Movement, was a period of artistic and literary development in the 1960s and early 1970s, which sought to express the varieties of black experience in the United States. The literature of the movement, generally written in black English vernacular and confrontational in tone, addressed such issues as interracial tension, social and political awareness, and the relevance of African history and culture to blacks in the United States.

Alice Walker (b. 1944), writer, activist  
Gelatin silver print, 1991  
Courtesy of the photographer, Oakland, California

#### Narrative:

Oakland-based photographer Jean Weisinger is a self-taught artist. Since the mid-1980s, she has documented the political activities of African American women, such as Alice Walker. She also focused her camera on aspects of the African diaspora, the scattering of a people from their traditional homeland.

Born in 1944 into a sharecropper family, Alice Walker is an African American writer whose novels, short stories, and poems are noted for their insights into black American culture. While studying at Spelman College and Sarah Lawrence College, Walker became involved with the civil-rights movement. Her experiences during this period informed much of her writing. Her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), traced a family's attempt to conquer a kind of emotional slavery that existed across three generations. In 1973, she published *In Love & Trouble: Stories of Black Women* followed by *Meridian* (1976), a novel about a young woman in the civil-rights movement. Walker later wrote perhaps her most popular novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), which won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983. Written in Black English vernacular, the book depicted a black woman's struggle for racial and sexual equality.

#### Creative Response:

Ask your parents about the most important event in your family's history and write a poem about it.
Art and Activism

Artistic Movements

Music, particularly free jazz, was one of the artistic genres that dominated the Black Arts Movement. For many African American musicians of this period, jazz was more than music. It became a way for them to express their feelings about life and respond to the events happening around them.

Charles (Chuck) Stewart (b. 1927)

*Portrait of John Coltrane (1926-1967), jazz tenor and soprano saxophonist, and Alice Coltrane (b. 1937), pianist, organist, harpist and composer*

Gelatin silver print, 1966

Courtesy of Chuck Stewart, Teaneck, New Jersey

Narrative:

Best known as a jazz photographer, Charles (Chuck) Stewart studied photography at Ohio University and moved to New York City after graduation. Between 1950 and 1980, he photographed hundreds of musicians and vocalists onstage and in his studio. Stewart’s images included musicians of jazz, blues, bebop, fusion, salsa, and other popular musical styles.

John Coltrane was an American saxophone player, composer, and combo (small group) leader. He is considered by many to be one of the most influential saxophonists in the history of jazz music. In his final year of high school, Coltrane began playing the alto saxophone, imitating much of Charlie Parker’s bebop style. He spent his early career drifting from band to band, and did not achieve much fame until recording with the Miles Davis Quintet in the 1950s. By that time, Coltrane had developed his own style on the tenor saxophone and was receiving international recognition for his solos. During the early 1960s, Coltrane developed an intense interest in free jazz, a style in which musicians often ignore the limits and rules and sometimes create very unusual sounds with their instruments. Some of his music of this period was so complex that it seemed almost chaotic.

Through his music, Coltrane reacted to the often tragic events of the civil rights movement, such as the Watts riots and the Selma-to-Montgomery civil rights march. His song “Alabama” was an emotional tribute to four African American children who were killed when the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was bombed by white segregationists.

Creative Response:

In small groups, write a song about a current event that has been on the news and in the newspapers. Put the lyrics to the tune of a familiar children’s song (or rap) and perform it in front of the class.
A History Deconstructed

The last two decades have seen African American artists using their art to examine the impact of history on today’s society. The photographers in this section look at photography more as an aesthetic metaphor than an accurate document. The symbolic and expressive imagery of their works is intended to reveal and weaken the power that rigid conceptions of race and gender hold in our own culture. Blending the many different forms of mass communication that help to shape American society today, these artists often juxtapose texts and images and mix fact with fantasy to challenge the viewer’s assumptions about the authenticity of the image. Photography is an especially appropriate medium for their work, since it has historically been used as a tool of racism and colonial expansion. To counter this historical use of photography, these artists explore family relationships as well as issues of labor, economic class, and social prejudice. Some seek to reestablish their right, using photography or any medium, to access the inner realms of spirituality and belief. Their works explore ritual, myth, and folklore as they seek to define the self in a today’s society.

The following lessons investigate the use of the photographic image as a primary tool in the aesthetic investigation of personal and racial history. As you look at each of the photographs, consider the following:

- What do you see when you look at this image?
- What do the images/objects in the work symbolize?
- What is going on in this picture?
- What story is the image telling? What details help tell the story?
- What group, event, issue, or community does the artist reference in the work?
- How would you describe the mood of each image?
- How does the artist create that mood?
- What patterns or repeated motifs can you find in the work?
- Why do you think the photographer made this work?
- What might he/she have wanted to communicate with each image?
- What sort of response do you think the photographer wanted you to have?
As seen in the previous sections, photographs are made for a variety of reasons. Throughout history, particularly in the early years, people have had their portraits taken to preserve their likenesses for future generations. Photographs also serve documentary purposes, influencing cultural and political opinion. Still others, such as the ones in this section, are specifically intended for exhibition as art, and are appreciated for their formal qualities and expressiveness. Considering the primary purpose for which each was taken can enhance one’s appreciation of photographs.

African American photographers of the 1980s and 1990s used the photographic image to make visual statements about modern day culture as well as the past. Often informed by personal experience, these photographers explore themes focusing on their own families and communities and address issues like stereotyping, identity, and spirituality. Both the symbolic and expressive imagery of works produced during this period offer sociological and psychological insights into the past.

Amalia Amaki (b. 1949)
*Three Cheers for the Red, White & Blue, #15*
Cyanotype on cotton, 1995
Courtesy of Charlotte Clark, Smyrna, Georgia

Narrative:
African American photographers, such as Amalia Amaki and Pat Ward Williams, explored and redefined the photographic image. Respecting the photograph as document, they view it as a metaphor that helps them redefine personal and racial histories.

Amalia Amaki uses family photographs and historical images to reinterpret and transform the media image of black America. She transfers photographs of jazz vocalists such as Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith onto fabric and arranges the images with American icons and symbols such as flags, patriotic colors, and buttons. The iron markings in this work (left) reference the domestic servant or slave role held by many African American women in the 1800s and early 1900s.

Pat Ward Williams employs an intimate narrative, referring to the ways in which black women view themselves. She chronicles black women’s history as well as her own personal experiences, addressing a multiplicity of societal and autobiographical issues, including race, culture, and identity. *Delia* is based on old family snapshots and experiences. The coded messages allow the viewer to focus on the words, which provide both a narrative and visual reading of her work.

Creative Response:

Choose an object to stand as a metaphor for you and write about why this object symbolizes you. (Or pick an event in your life that you can represent metaphorically.)

Pat Ward Williams (b. 1948)
*Delia*, Mural print and mixed media, 1992
Courtesy of the photographer and Peter and Eileen Norton, Santa Monica, California
A History Deconstructed

Digital Imagery

Many artists who work with photography have welcomed the computer as a natural extension of the medium. In contrast to conventional cameras, recently developed digital cameras use no film at all, but instead store photographs as data on disks. Using the computer, artists can manipulate and work with images scanned from a digital camera and then print the final work of art as a photograph.

Stephen Marc (b. 1954)

*Untitled, Soul Searching* series
Digital montage print on silver gelatin paper, 1997
Courtesy of the artist, Tempe, Arizona

Narrative:

Stephen Marc uses digital techniques to create autobiographical montages. A montage is a work of art composed by assembling, overlaying, and overlapping various types of materials or pieces collected from different sources. Marc creates his works by combining family snapshots, found imagery, and his own photographs of landscapes and portraits made in Ghana, Jamaica, England, and the United States. Selected for their specific visual content, these image elements are arranged to make a single visual statement.

In contrast to *collage*, a montage creates a unified image in which technique is somewhat more concealed (a task made easier in recent years through digital imaging). Since elements are chosen for their meaning rather than their physical characteristics, montage is likely to be more concerned with an explicit message than collage. Marc’s *Soul Searching* series addresses cultural and historical memory in terms of the paradoxical experience of the African diaspora.

Note: The term *photomontage* was first used by German Dada artists in the early 1920s to identify works in which multiple photo elements were joined with type and other graphic devices. At the time, it was used extensively for commercial illustration and advertising. Today, however, montage is an established artistic and illustrative technique used with many degrees of sophistication and success.

Creative Response:

Create an autobiographical photomontage by selecting images from magazines and newspapers that represent you or an event you have experienced. Completely fill a sheet of paper, arranging and affixing images to make a single visual statement. Show the finished artwork to your classmates, and have them guess what you are trying to express about yourself.
**Vocabulary Key**

**Albumen prints** were the most common type of photography in the 19th century. The albumen paper introduced in 1850 was made by coating ordinary paper with an emulsion of light-sensitive salts of silver suspended in albumen (egg white), producing a photographic image on a glossy surface. Most albumen prints were mounted on cardboard (see “carte-de-visite”), because the paper was rather thin and curled easily.

**Cabinet cards** all but replaced the carte-de-visite in popularity when introduced in the 1870s. The larger size allowed for portraits of individuals and groups posed in more complex settings, and the deep bottom margin provided space for the photographer’s signature or studio logotype. Cabinet cards remained in vogue until the introduction of the postcard at the turn of the century.

**Cartes-de-visite** were small albumen portrait photographs glued to cards. Immensely popular from 1850s-1870s, these inexpensive “calling cards” were exchanged with relatives and friends and displayed in albums. In the United States, the Civil War gave this format enormous momentum as soldiers and their families posed for cartes before they were separated by war – or death.

**Civil rights** are the rights of all citizens to legal, social, and economic equality and protection under the law.

**Collage** is a work of art made by pasting bits of paper, cloth or other material onto a flat surface.

**Cyanotypes**, when invented in 1842, were the first successful non-silver photographic printing process, and were used to illustrate the first book with photographs. Cyanotypes are still popular today as an alternative process. Images are printed from negatives onto paper or cloth coated with light-sensitive iron compounds. When exposed to natural or artificial ultraviolet light, images ranging from pale to deep blue result. This process is also known as blue-printing and sun-printing.

**Daguerreotypes** were the first practical form of photography, made public in 1839 by Louis J. M. Daguerre of France. This one-of-a-kind photographic image was produced on a sheet of silver-plated copper, polished to a mirror-like brilliance. It was sensitized over iodine vapor, exposed in the camera, and developed with mercury vapor. Although prized for its finely detailed image, the daguerreotype has an exceptionally fragile surface, and for this reason, is always presented behind glass in frames or small folding cases.

**Diaspora** refers to the scattering of a people from their traditional homeland.
Vocabulary Key

**Digital images** can be created by a range of processes using computer technology, including photographically rendering an image on the computer, manipulating an image scanned from a digital camera, and combining images from separate sources to create a digital **montage**.

**Free Jazz** is a style in which musicians often ignore the constraints of key signatures, bar lines, or musical form and sometimes create very unusual sounds with their instruments.

**Gelatin-silver prints** are the most common type of black and white photograph. Both the film’s negative and the paper on which the photographic image is printed are treated with the light-sensitive silver compounds suspended in a gelatin-based emulsion.

**Metaphor**, the application of a word or phrase to somebody or something that is not meant literally but to make a comparison, For example, saying that somebody is a snake (one thing used or considered to represent another)

**Mixed media** are images created by combining materials and techniques from two or more of the graphic arts, fine arts, and crafts. The intent is to achieve a more varied, complex, or subtle expressiveness than is not possible using only one medium.

**Montage** is a work of art composed by assembling, overlaying, and overlapping various types of materials or pieces collected from different sources. Image elements are selected for their specific visual content and arranged to make a single visual statement.

**Photo essay** is a series of related photographs focusing on a specific topic that is intended to be viewed collectively.

**Photomontage**, term was first used by German Dada artists in the early 1920s to identify works in which multiple photo elements were joined with type and other graphic devices. At the time, it was used extensively for commercial illustration and advertising. Today, however, montage is an established artistic and illustrative technique used with many degrees of sophistication and success.

**Portrait**, a likeness of a person or group, made from a posed sitting for a painting or a photograph

**Segregation** is the practice of separating people by race, ethnicity, or religion.

**Viewfinder**, the part of the camera that you look through when taking a picture
J.P. (James Presley) Ball (1825–1905)

Ball was a free black man, a photographer, an abolitionist, and a businessman. Born in Virginia, his interest in photography began in 1845 after he met John B. Bailey, a black daguerreotypist from Boston. In the fall of that year, Ball opened a one-room daguerrean studio in Cincinnati, the place where he spent most of his young adult life. Like many daguerreans in the early years, Ball worked as an itinerant, traveling from city to city before settling for a time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and then in Richmond, Virginia. When Ball returned to Ohio in 1847, he opened a studio, Ball's Great Daguerrean Gallery of the West, which was one of the largest galleries in Cincinnati. His success led him to open a second gallery and form a partnership with his brother-in-law, Alexander Thomas. Despite his many successes in Cincinnati, Ball eventually dissolved his partnership with Thomas and moved to Minneapolis sometime in the late 1870s or early 1880s, and later to Helena, Montana. During this period, Ball was busy in the city of Helena, producing numerous photographs of the white, black, and Asian communities. It is likely that Ball moved to Seattle in 1900 and opened another photographic studio under the name of Globe Photo Studio.

Addison N. Scurlock (1883–1964)

Addison Scurlock was Howard University's official photographer. He opened a studio in 1911, which he operated with his wife and sons until his death in 1964. Addison’s sons, Robert (1916–1994) and George (b. 1919), worked with him in the Scurlock Studios beginning in the 1930s and continued to run the studio until Robert’s death sixty years later. When both sons were high school students, they apprenticed with their father, receiving extensive training in portrait photography under his direction. While Addison did a substantial amount of studio photography, Robert and George were drawn to news photography. Their journalistic photographs appeared in black newspapers and magazines across the country. The Scurlock Studios worked diligently to increase the visibility of the black community life, intellectuals, artists, musicians, and politicians in the Washington, D.C. area. In 1948, Robert and George established the Capitol School of Photography, which opened its doors to World War II veterans and others who wanted to learn photography. They offered both day and evening classes to hundreds of students until the school closed in 1952.

James VanDerZee (1886–1983)

VanDerZee captured the spirit and life of New York’s Harlem for more than sixty years. His photographs exemplify the Pictorialist aesthetic—the dominant mode of fine-art photography at the turn of the century—and contain the quiet and meditative quality that is its hallmark. Despite their romanticism, however, VanDerZee’s photographs were based in the political and social upheaval of the early twentieth century. His images define a people and culture in transition and reflect their subjects’ sense of identity and self-awareness. His use of nineteenth-century formalist compositional elements to photograph twentieth-century subjects was an elegant and intelligent way of devising a revisionist and optimistic overview of the African American experience.
Artist Biographies

Art and Activism

Jack Franklin (b. 1922)
A prolific photographer since the early 1940s, Franklin’s work includes photographs of performing artists, neighborhoods, and family celebrations, among other subjects. Franklin began photographing while in high school. He later worked in the South Pacific as a photographer for the U. S. Army during World War II. Upon returning to Philadelphia after the war, Franklin became active in photographing social and political events in the city. During the early 1950s, Franklin worked as a staff and freelance photographer for black newspapers. Like the other socially committed photographers who emerged during the 1960s, Franklin photographed the political milieu of the period.

Jonathan Eubanks (b. 1927)
Eubanks, of Oakland, California, focused his camera on the activities of the Black Panther party. A visual chronicler of the party’s activities, Eubanks employed a documentary style that is both emotional and descriptive. His photographs explore the personal world of the party leaders and members, often showing their encounters with the police.

Charles (Chuck) Stewart (b. 1927)
Best known as a jazz photographer, Stewart studied photography at Ohio University and moved to New York City after graduation. While still in school, he began to photograph jazz musicians primarily. He later freelanced for newspapers and magazines, including Our World. He started photographing jazz musicians and vocalists full-time onstage and in his studio. He photographed hundreds of musicians active between 1950 and 1980. Stewart’s coverage included blues, bebop, fusion, salsa, and other popular musical styles.

Jean Weisinger (b. 1954)
Oakland-based photographer Weisinger is a self-taught artist. Since the mid-1980s, she has documented the political activities of African American women as well as focused her camera on aspects of the African diaspora.

A History Deconstructed

Amalia Amaki (b. 1949)
Amaki uses family photographs and historical images to reinterpret and transform the media image of black America. She transfers photographs of jazz vocalists such as Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith onto fabric and arranges the images with American icons and symbols such as flags, patriotic colors, and buttons.

Pat Ward Williams (b. 1948)
Williams employs an intimate narrative form referring to the visual constructions of black women. She chronicles black women’s history as well as her own personal experiences, addressing a multiplicity of societal and autobiographical issues, including race, culture, and identity. Williams’s early work is based on old family snapshots and experiences. The coded messages allow the viewer to focus on the words, which provide both a narrative and visual reading of her work.

Stephen Marc (b. 1954)
Marc’s Soul Searching imagery addresses cultural and historical memory in terms of the paradoxical experience of the African diaspora. He makes autobiographical montages by combining family snapshots, found imagery, and his own photographs of landscapes and portraits made in Ghana, Jamaica, England, and the United States.
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