



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2006 Volume I: Photographing America: A Cultural History, 1840-1970

Photojournalists for Social Change

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Introduction

IMAGES FROM MY CHILDHOOD: Jackie Kennedy with blood on her dress standing by LBJ, while he is sworn in as President. John-John saluting his father's coffin. The Beatles. Malcolm X raising his hand defiantly. Roger Maris in Yankee pinstripes smiling, finally, when he beat Babe Ruth for the most home runs in a season. Alan Shepard, our New Hampshire hometown boy, as the first American in space. Martin Luther King standing in front of The Jefferson Memorial at the march on Washington. Albert DeSalvo "The Boston Strangler" in handcuffs at Boston Police station. These are the images that shaped me personally and defined my generation. Back then, way back then, before color TV, we waited for *Life Magazine* .

From *Life* I developed a long love affair with photography. I learned about the great photographers and I learned how to use a camera. Back then I hadn't been ruined by the drive to get a good photo so I happily snapped away at everything with my Kodak Instamatic. Then I saw a photograph that taught me that in addition to relaying information about something newsworthy, a photograph could amaze and transport me in a way that was very new and very different. The first time I "saw" a great photograph I was 17 or so and I saw a photograph taken by Ansel Adams, *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico*, (www.AnselAdams.com) in a magazine while waiting in a doctor's office.

The image was small, but I could still see this shocking streak of light over a graveyard in this little town in New Mexico. At the time I had never been to New Mexico and I had never heard of Ansel Adams. The picture was in a coupon of some sort and I filled it out and got the poster. It stayed with me through many, many moves and now it is framed, finally, and hangs in my classroom at The High School in the Community. Such is the power of an image.

Audience

My unit "Photojournalism For Social Change" will be used in my high school journalism class, grades 9 through 12 with intermediate level readers. This unit can be modified to fit any reading level. My class is called "Cultural Journalism," because we explore more than just news stories. We explore the world and the people in it, in as many varied ways as we have time. We read a variety of books including *Friday Night Lights* , written by a journalist who spent a year in Texas to better understand Texas football, *Fahrenheit 451* to look at our future without the first amendment or access to real news, and *In Cold Blood* , journalism as a novel.

We also read a variety of articles from many different sources including *The New York Times*, *The New Haven Register*, *The New Yorker* and *Time* . I also use larger pieces anthologized in the Best American Sports writing and the Best Crime writing. Students write formal essays on these topics and each student is responsible for contributing one feature article for the school newspaper. And next year my unit "Photojournalists for Social Change" will become a month long project in which we explore how photography can be used to effect change in society and in the city of New Haven.

My students love photographs. They bring them in to show their friends, often interrupting a class. They take pictures of the prom, pictures of their friends, their families and, in some cases, of their children. When they take their pictures they just snap away without any regard to composition or lighting. I see them walking around the halls taking pictures of their friends leaning against a locker or just leaning, usually posing, often with gang signs, outside the school building. I don't have anything against that all -- in fact these photos are of their real experience of school. But, I have higher aspirations for them. Although that is normal and somewhat sweet in its innocence, I want to move them from just blindly snapping away. I want them to explore their world more, go outside and take chances, and really see their world, their neighborhood, and better understand their place in it.

First, it makes sense to teach kids about photography -- simple things like learning not to take a picture in front of a window, to hold the camera steady, to make sure they aren't cutting off the heads of the people in the photo, and how to frame a picture. I will teach them what I know, and I have two friends who work as photographers who will come in, and talk to the kids as professionals, and to share their knowledge and experience and some of their work.

Strategies

With basic knowledge of the fundamentals of photography the class will turn its attention to the photographs themselves. We will spend the next two weeks looking at pictures by photographers who worked to show us the world and to effect change. We will study five photographers who made a significant impact on the world through their exploration of social conditions. Although there are so many great, even extraordinary, photographers, for the purposes of this unit I will concentrate on those who made their mark on photojournalism.

We will explore the plight of the poor, and the horrors of child labor, and the

construction of The Empire State building through the work of Lewis Hine. Dorothea Lange will take us on a journey to see the hardship of the migrant workers during the Depression. Through observing the work of Margaret Bourke-White we will pay homage to the first person and the first woman to do the first cover for *Life*. Through

her bravery we will better understand the horrors of Buchenwald, the wonder of Gandhi,

and the glory of the Chrysler building. Gordon Parks, the first African American

photographer hired by *Life* will show us the sadness of racism in the 1950's and 60's with such photos as *American Gothic* and *Norman Jr. reading in bed*, as well as the rising sense of black power with portraits of both Malcolm X and Muhammed Ali.

The unit will end with a more contemporary photographer, Bruce Davidson, who photographed East Harlem, Central Park, and Brooklyn gangs, thereby reflecting back the beauty of teenagers and the city amidst the squalor and stereotypes. In addition to seeing these photographs students will read about the photographers' lives including what influenced them, how they grew up, and how they became interested in the subjects they chose.

I intend to take my students to a comfortable place, outside our classroom, where we can really look at a photograph. We have one room in my school that we can darken, that has a good screen, to create a hushed, almost reverent space. In this room we will be able to really see these powerful photographs enlarged on a screen and spend quiet time just looking. During this time I will have a set of questions ready for each photo. For example when we look at the famous photograph by Dorothea Lange of the woman and child taken during the depression *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, 1936*, I will ask them how old they think she is and what little details in the photo tell part of her story. We will also visit the Yale Art Gallery and take a trip to New York to the Museum of Modern Art to see some of the original photographs.

We will transition from looking at photographs to becoming photographers. The way I intend to do this is to show the documentary *Born Into Brothels*, a film which won the Academy Award for Best documentary in 2005. It is about a photojournalist, Zana Briski, who went to India to photograph the women who work as prostitutes in the red-light district of Calcutta. She soon discovered, however, that because they were too afraid of repercussions they would not allow their photograph to be taken. Instead, she got permission to take pictures of their kids.

Most of the kids she worked with were between the ages of 10 and 12. The caste system in India prevents these kids from going to school or in any way escaping their fate, because their mothers were prostitutes, which is illegal. The children are not allowed to go to school, therefore doomed to a life of poverty and, at least for the girls, a future as a prostitute.

Briski decided to reach them by connecting them to a larger world view through photography. She gave each kid, ten in all, a camera and told them to photograph whatever they wanted. She showed them how to use the camera and let them go. What

they came back with was so haunting and so real that they make the viewer want to stand up and do something about this problem in a far off country.

My favorite one is of a young kid smiling for the first time in the documentary when he was taken to the beach

and allowed to go in the water. Their photos were eventually

shown in art galleries throughout the world and are for sale online at [www.Kids-with-cameras.Org/Born Into Brothels](http://www.Kids-with-cameras.Org/Born%20Into%20Brothels), using the proceeds as a way to continue to support these kids.

I showed this in my documentary film class last year and of all the ones we watched, this was their favorite. It was the first time they understood the power of photography and that everyone, including them, can make a difference. All is not hopeless. Students will begin to connect photojournalism with problems in their own communities.

Before they viewed this film last year I asked the class if there was anything they felt they could do individually to change some of the problems they face and see everyday, and they all said, "No." The problems they talked about included inadequate housing, the homeless, single mothers without resources, teenage pregnancy, abandoned buildings, the way the police treat them, gangs, violence, their relationship to Yale, and either the horror or happiness of their family life.

Each student will receive a camera and go into their communities and take pictures. They will choose a photographer we studied and try to match the style, while they develop their own style. Picasso said that all the best artists steal from each other.

At the end of this unit each student will have a body of work. Each will make a coffee table book of their work that will include their photographs, their interpretation of them and a biography of the photographer whose style they chose to emulate. These will be on display in the school library.

Lewis Hine -- The Social Worker with a Camera

One of my objectives with this unit is to get students to bring the social conditions around them to light. Lewis Hine, known as the social worker with a camera, is an excellent photographer with whom to start. Hine, known primarily for his work to change child labor laws, was born in 1874 in Wisconsin. His father, who was a veteran of the Civil War, died in an accident in 1892 and from that point on Hine was responsible for his family's financial welfare. One of the jobs he had to do to help maintain his family was work in an upholstery factory for 13 hours a day, six days a week. His first-hand experience with the rigors and exploitation of children led to his life long crusade against child labor.

Hine was able to escape his fate when asked to become the photographer for the Ethical Culture Society. His job there was to photograph the social and academic parts of the school. He soon learned that photography has power and that it could be used as a way to reveal the truth about society's flaws.

In 1908 The National Child Labor Committee, an agency devoted to changing child welfare, asked him to work as their photographer. He had a monthly salary and for the next few years he traveled from the Northeast to the South, photographing children at work. He photographed them in mines, factories, textile mills. One of the most famous of these photographs is *Ten Year Old spinner in a North Carolina cotton mill* (www.digitalgallery.nypl.org). In this photo we see a young girl, perhaps 10, possibly younger, standing in a factory between two rows of textile machines. Clearly she has been asked to pose as she is looking directly at the camera. The light through the large factory window reflects off the ceiling making the rest of the photo appear dingy and dirty. She is dwarfed by these looming machines, making one wonder how she can still stand up after the enormous effort it must have taken her to work the line. Is she responsible for both sides, I wonder? Does she know that she is working too hard for a child? She seems complacent, though, as her hands are

down by her side, almost in a rigid manner, and has accepted her fate, not knowing there are any other choices for her.

Hine often had to disguise himself to get inside the factory and take photographs that exposed the harshness inside. He took on the identity of a Bible salesman, a postcard salesman and an industrial photographer whose job was to make a record of the machinery. He certainly would not have been allowed access if the shop owners knew that he was specifically taking these pictures in order to stop child labor abuse.

Another photo taken in 1911, *Children at Washington cotton Mills, Fries, Virginia* (www.vahistorical.org/exhibits/hine) has been taken by Hine with permission from the owner. It is a group of children, about 20-30 kids, mostly boys, posing for the camera. They are huddled together, the girls wearing skirts and the boys wearing pants, and most of them have their arms crossed in front. They are neither smiling nor frowning. One gets a sense of acceptance and resignation. In the background is a large industrial building they had left for the photo. Hine's caption at the bottom of the photo reads "some of the youngsters working in the spinning rooms of the Washington Cotton Mills, Fries, Virginia were posed by the overseer, who said, 'these boys are a bad lot.' When questioned, they all said they were fourteen yrs. Old or more." From this comment by the overseer, an interesting choice of wording by Hine, we can assume the owner is proud of how many workers he has. Also we can assume he has no guilt because they are a "bad" lot and nothing else could be done with them except to put them to work.

Factory owners and other people complained that they were tired of these dreary pictures. Hine responded to this criticism by saying, "Perhaps you are weary of child labor pictures. Well, so are the rest of us, but we propose to make you and the whole country so sick and tired of the whole business that when the time for action comes, child labor pictures will be records of the past." He was soon proved successful in his actions as Americans did come to believe that limits should be set. Congress passed laws in 1916 but the Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional because they "denied children the freedom to contract work."

It wasn't until 1924 that Congress was able to pass a national child labor law. However, history tells us that child labor only really began to disappear because of the great depression when adults found themselves needing to take these jobs. It wasn't until FDR signed the Fair Labor standards act in 1938, which set minimum hours and wages and placed serious limitations on child labor. Children under 16 were then prohibited from working in so-called dangerous jobs such as mining. Even though it took years for child labor laws to change, it is largely because of Hine that the problem came into view; this forced the federal government to do something about it. Hine went on to take many more photos of children at work and later a book of his work *Kids At Work* by Russell Freedman, was published. Hine went on to work for the Red Cross exposing the harsh conditions in tenements, the working conditions for women, and the plight of the Pittsburg miners.

One of his most famous commissions was his last one. He was asked to be the official photographer of the construction of the Empire State Building. Knowing what we know of Hine, he seems an unlikely choice as the person to document the construction of what would become "the tallest building in the world." Again Hine took many risks taking these pictures. He hung from rafters 100 stories high to get aerial views so that the viewer could see the risk involved for the workers and the sheer vastness of this undertaking.

Hine's most striking work from this 1931 collection, is *Icarus Atop Empire State Building*, (Freedman, *Kids at Work*, p.82). This photograph shows a worker dressed in overalls, no shirt, climbing a cable wire, without a harness, working his way to the top of the building to do some more work. Below him is the rest of the city, which looks like little small houses, the way houses look when we fly. That gives us an idea of just how high up this man is. It also gives us the impression of how brave and hard-working he was and in that way shows the

nobility of work, a direct departure for Hine. He began his career showing the degradation of work and ended it by showing the working class as heroes. The title is intriguing. It implies that perhaps man is flying a little too close to the sun, showing Hine's ambiguity about the Empire State Building. It is interesting to note that Hine was able to see both the sadness and the wonder of the world. Hine received a great deal of positive attention for this project but like everyone else during the Depression he had a hard time supporting himself. He apparently died destitute and on relief in 1940.

Margaret Bourke-White

Margaret Bourke-White, younger than Hine, began the artistic part of her career photographing another New York City monumental building, the Chrysler building. In some ways one could say she worked in reverse from Hine. She started by photographing and paying homage to the great buildings of industry that surrounded her and then went on to use her camera for social change.

Her photograph, *Chrysler building gargoyle*, (www.editorial.gettyimages.com) taken in 1930, shows the height and magnificence of the Chrysler building. Like Hine's photographs of the Empire State Building, she, too, is paying homage to the building's magnificence and beauty. The steel gargoyle, with the face of an eagle, looks out over the rest of the city as if to proclaim its dominance. Bourke-White is clearly paying tribute to the building, a building in which she could afford to maintain an office on the 61st floor. In order to capture this image she also had to take enormous risks that involved great heights. A common theme among great photojournalists is bravery and the ability to take risks.

Bourke-White was born in the Bronx in 1904. Her father was a civil engineer whose hobby was photography, and her mother worked in publishing. Bourke-White was a child of educated people who had huge expectations for her. All of this would prove advantageous to her ability to make her mark on the world.

Margaret Bourke-White graduated from Cornell in 1929. In 1930 she was the first western photographer allowed in the Soviet Union. She was the first photographer to join

Life. Her photograph *Fort Peck Dam, Montana*, (www.editorial.gettyimages.com) appeared on *Life Magazine's* first cover in 1936. In her career she would continue to be first at many things.

This photograph of the dam shows the massive cement structure of the foundation supports. It is taken horizontally and from an angle so that the viewer can see there are immense rows of these support beams. Their immensity mirrors the Egyptian pyramids. To show their immensity she has placed two figures in the forefront. They look like two ants compared to the dam. The photo clearly glorifies the dam and the ability of mankind to harness nature for our needs. At that time she is quoted as saying that "the purpose of art is to find beauty in the big things of the age. Today that big thing is industry." However, working for *Life Magazine* changed everything for her. In addition to changing her style of photography she left the grandeur of the industrial life and started to focus on social conditions and people.

In 1937 she traveled to the Deep South and documented the living conditions of poor tenant farmers. It was that same year that she published one of her most famous and perhaps her most powerful photographs: *Bread Line during the Louisville flood, Kentucky, 1937* (www.masters-of-photography.com/bourke-white). This picture,

taken from the side, depicts about twelve black people, men and women. They are standing in a bread line after the flood. They are clearly exhausted and hungry. Some are facing forward and some are looking ahead to see when they will be able to get food. Behind them is a billboard that shows a white family, smiling in their new car, with the caption, "there's no way like the American Way." It is the irony that makes this picture great. Although Bourke-White came from money and was white she was clearly bothered by the fact that the American way or if you will, the American dream, does not exist for black people. It also shows her growth as an artist and her deeply felt understanding of the unfairness of life and the inherent racism in America.

Bourke-White continued to be first at many other things. She was also the first woman allowed to be a war correspondent for the Army and the first woman to cross the German border with Patton. Because she was with Patton's third army when they reached Buchenwald, she became one of the first photographers to enter the death camps in Germany. Her photographs from that visit, *the living dead of Buchenwald* (www.uiowa.edu/policult/political/photos/holocaust2.html) are shocking which is what they were meant to do. One photograph shows the prisoners behind barbed wire waiting to be released. The men in front are clinging to the wire. They are all dressed in prison stripes and have gaunt expressions on their faces. They appear helpless and scared, but there is slight look of hope as their picture is being taken and the American army has arrived.

The other photo is of civilians from the town. Patton was so outraged he made them come over and look at what their leaders had done. They are walking around in suits, clearly not looking at a pile of dead, emaciated bodies heaped on top of each other. They are so emaciated they are practically skeletons. One woman in the photo is shielding her

eyes from the horror around her. The other people in the photo are U.S. soldiers walking around in disbelief. Bourke-White said of this experience, "I saw and photographed the piles of naked, lifeless bodies, the human skeletons in furnaces, and the living skeletons that would die the next day and have their tattooed skin for lampshades. Using the camera was almost a relief. It interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me." Not only did these photos of Buchenwald make multitudes of people aware of the atrocity, they also changed *Life Magazine's* policy of not using pictures that would upset people. In fact *Life Magazine* after publishing them said, "Dead men will have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them." Margaret Bourke-White was one of the most famous and successful photographers of her time.

Dorothea Lange

Although Bourke-White also photographed drought victims of the Dust Bowl, it is Dorothea Lange we associate with the classic pictures from this time. Following our discussion of Hine and Bourke-White and after our exposure to their work, we will delve into a study of Dorothea Lange, whose life work shared their "social documentary" style.

Like them, Lange used images to draw national attention to the plight of the underprivileged and dispossessed. Her most famous photographs are of migrant workers and tenant farmers in rural areas of the United States during the Depression Era. Her photograph, *Migrant Mother*, discussed earlier, is the most famous example of this work.

Dorothea Lange studied photography at Columbia University in New York. She began her career, however, as a portrait photographer in San Francisco, but was so affected by the number of homeless in the area that she changed her focus and began to use her skill to draw attention to this problem.

Like Hine, Lange also suffered tragedy when she was young. She was born in New Jersey in 1895. When she was seven she contracted polio and it left her with a limp. The neighborhood children made fun of her and even her mother was apparently embarrassed by her. When she was twelve, her father walked out on her family and they never heard from him again. These two events traumatized her and probably served as the impetus and left her with the amazing sense of empathy that she has in her work. Bored by school and disillusioned by life she often cut class and walked around the lower east side of Manhattan, taking photographs of people, thus beginning her life long ability to meet and connect with people while taking their picture.

One of the best known works, *The White Angel Breadline*, (www.masters-of-photography.com/Lange) she took while walking around San Francisco in 1933. It is considered one of her street photos. It is of a group of men in a bread line waiting in line for some food. It prefigures Bourke-White's photo of the Louisville flood. The men are waiting to bring food home to their families, but one man, only one, has his back to the other men. He is the only one looking away from the end of the line. He is wearing a light hat and our eyes are drawn to it. He is resting his hands on the fence that blocks all of them in and he is cradling a cup of water, perhaps coffee. His hat is over his eyes but he is looking slightly downward and in no hurry, although he is dirty and probably starving.

During the Depression the government created The Farm Security Administration (FSA) to give work to writers and other artists asking them to document the era. Lange was able to get a position with them. She decided to travel to the south and take pictures of out of work sharecroppers. She went to Oklahoma to take pictures of the disenfranchised people from the dust bowl, and traveled through California meeting and photographing migrant laborers. Lange had no trouble walking into camps, where the homeless people would be preparing meals and talk to them until they felt comfortable enough to have their picture taken. It was there she took *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (www.masters-of-photography.com/Lange) . Taken in 1936, it still graces the cover of many a photography book and an edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* . It is the image most people draw on in their memory bank when thinking of the Depression era.

I have used this photograph in my classes because of its power. It shows a woman, 32 years old (who looks much older), staring out from a tent. She is holding a sleeping baby

in her arms, and has two other children, one on each side of her, looking away from the camera. The woman who is seated is looking ahead but off into the distance. Her hand is up to her chin. It is this gesture that moves me. The hand is so gentle, so supportive, yet hardened from her work as a field laborer. Her forehead has worry lines and her eyes are narrowed and staring off into space. They are dressed in rags but retain their dignity. It does not feel like a posed picture thus following Lange's motto, "Hands off! I do not molest what I photograph, I do not meddle, and I do not arrange."

World War II brought an end to the Depression and an end to Lange's work with the Farm Service Administration (FSA). During the war she became deeply upset by the way Japanese Americans were treated after Pearl Harbor. Outraged by our government's decision to force them to relocate to internment camps, once again she used her camera to show the truth. She did a whole series of work on this topic.

One photo that stands out is titled *Japanese boy awaiting evacuation, June 1942* (www.MyHero.com/Dorothea

Lange). It shows a young boy, about fourteen, sitting on his duffel bag and sleeping bag. He is dressed very nicely, in slacks, polished shoes, a suit jacket and a fashionable hat. He is looking away from the camera, not in disrespect or from shyness, but as if there is some information he can glean from far off, like where or when he is going. When I was in high school I did not learn about the Japanese camps. I can only imagine her horror at witnessing this event.

What is most notable and unique about Lange's work is the pride that shines through each person in each portrait, of even the most destitute subjects. Though she was shy, she was known for the personal relationships she developed with her subjects and the respect and care she had for them is evident in her work. Lange's style is also an interesting one for the students to explore. I will use Lange's work to discuss with the students how to document the various social problems that surround them without exploiting the people they document. Some people who suffer turn brittle with anger. Lange, to her credit, used her suffering, and her photography, to reach out to others and to try and changed the unfairness of life and the inequality of social conditions for the rest of her life. By the 1960's she was world famous. A retrospective of her work was held in her honor at the Museum of Modern Art in 1965, the same year of her death.

Gordon Parks

In addition to his iconic photography of subjects as wide-ranging as Red Jackson -- the infamous Harlem gang leader -- to Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X, Gordon Parks was a prolific author, filmmaker, and poet. Parks was born in Fort Scott, Kansas in 1912 in a town he later described as "electrified with racial tension." He was the 15th child born into this dirt poor family. His mother died while he was young and he was sent to live

with his sister in Minnesota. He never went to college. Instead he was thrown out of his sister's house and never got to finish high school.

Homeless by sixteen, he worked as a busboy, a piano player and mopped floors, which help explain his empathy for Ella Watson, the woman in his famous photograph *American Gothic*. He lived in a rat-infested tenement in Harlem until he found work as a waiter on the railroad. Working on the railroad and getting a chance to see more of the U.S. fueled his interest in photography. He bought his first camera, a Voigtlander, from a pawn shop. He dropped one of his first rolls of film off at Eastman Kodak. Kodak liked his work very much and later gave him his first exhibition.

Parks also worked for a while as a fashion photographer and made a name for himself. His first real big break came in 1941 when he won a fellowship from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a foundation dedicated to research about the south, with a special program designed to encourage the work of "promising blacks" in 1941. He used this fellowship to work in Washington, D.C. for Roy Stryker and the Farm Security Administration, like Lange before him.

Ironically, while working in Washington, D.C. Parks said, "I found out what prejudice was really like." He recalled the bigotry of that city as worse than any other place he had ever been. Stryker, who hired him, made him walk around the city to see how racist it was. It is from his treatment then that Parks decided to show the true Washington, D.C. to

the world. One evening, while Parks was having trouble figuring out how to accomplish this task, Stryker

pointed out a charwoman at work and suggested Parks talk to her. Parks did so and thus began his relationship with Ella Watson. Parks' photograph of her produced his most famous picture, *American Gothic* (www.masters-of-photography.com/Parks).

American Gothic is a picture of Watson in the nation's capital with a large American flag behind her. She is holding a broom in one hand and a mop in the other. Watson looks both tired and angry. Because it is intentionally modeled after the famous painting by Grant Wood we know that it is a carefully posed shot. In a way it is Parks' response to Bourke-White's photo *Louisville Flood* as it forces the viewer to question why blacks aren't allowed to partake in the American dream. Here is a woman who mopped floors for the government all her life but can barely afford to sustain her existence.

I assume she posed for Parks in this way because he had taken the time to get to know her. Watson's life was a hard one. She had to struggle on her own after her mother died and her father was killed by a lynch mob. She married, became pregnant and then her husband was shot to death before her daughter was born. Watson's family included an adopted daughter, and her grandchildren, all living on just over a thousand dollars a year. Parks became deeply involved with her and family and took many more photographs of her and her family. It was the beginning of making close relationships with his subjects.

Parks was hired by *Life* in 1948, the first African-American to be honored with this distinction. His first assignment remains his most significant. He suggested

doing a profile of a famous gang leader in Harlem, Red Jackson. Repeating his experience of getting deeply with his subjects Parks stayed with the gangs for three months. His most famous photograph from this experience is of Red Jackson (*Half Past Autumn*, p. 81). It shows Jackson sitting in front of a dirty, shattered window in an abandoned building...watching. As the sunlight comes through the window it shows every detail of the boy's worried face. Red is smoking a cigarette, looking troubled, almost paranoid and because of the way the light hits him, there is only darkness behind him. As New Haven's gang violence continues to get worse with almost weekly shootings in primarily black neighborhoods, this photo, unfortunately, still resonates today.

In 1967 *Life* sent Parks on an assignment to find out why black people were so discontent. He chose the Bessie and Norman Fontanelle family to speak for all poor blacks. He took heart-wrenching photographs of this family; their home, their family dinners, and their horrendous living conditions. My favorite photo is *Norman, Jr. reading in Bed*, *Half Past Autumn*, p.233). Norman is lying on a bare mattress, with a blanket up to his waist trying to read in this dark, depressive space. The walls surrounding him are tenement walls with big splotches of cement fallen out making huge holes in the wall, as if they had been shot out. It reminds me of the poem *What happens to a Dream Deferred?* by Langston Hughes.

Parks wrote about their dire poverty and his words were published with the photos. So many readers were touched by their story that enough money was raised to buy them a house on Long Island. Unfortunately, a few months later, Norman Sr. came home drunk and fell asleep with a cigarette burning. The house was destroyed and Norman and a young son, Kenneth, were killed.

One photo from this time is, *Norman, Sr., burned from Scalding, is visited by Norman, Jr. at hospital* (*Half Past Autumn*, p.231). The father can barely sit up on his hospital bed. His face is scalded marring the entire right side of his face. His eyes are closed and he is bloody and devastated. Norman, Jr. with his head away from the camera looks down at the bed, an awkward and painful visit. Eventually the whole family fell apart; some were

just lost, one died from an overdose and one got A.I.D.S. Norman Jr. went to prison and died too, but no one knew how. Certainly no one knew why.

The readers of *Life*, who helped this family, meant well. They were trying to change a cycle of poverty that has been going on since slavery. Although well intentioned, it takes more than a new house to change generations of self-hate and the racism that is still rampant today. No matter how well off, African-Americans know they are still not fully invited to partake in the American Dream.

Another strong image from Parks' time with *Life* is his portrait of Malcolm X, (*Half Past Autumn* , p. 241.) It is probably the one I saw when I was a kid. It is a picture of Malcolm X delivering a speech during a black Muslim rally in Chicago in 1963. He is raising his hand to get the crowd to listen, and to get them to take action. Malcolm is dressed in a suit, the image he wanted to portray to white America, and he seems very much in charge. Parks and Malcolm became friends and very much admired each other. Malcolm X said of Parks, "Success among whites never made Parks lose touch with black reality." This, of course was the highest compliment one black man could give another at that time. Now my students refer, sometimes, to successful black people as "acting white." How sad that they relate success with acting like white people.

Parks stayed with *Life* until 1972, almost 25 years. While there he photographed the black Muslims, the black Panthers and Martin Luther King's death among many other things. In this way Parks provided mainstream America, the readers of *Life Magazine* , an up close and personal view of the civil rights movement.

Parks published his first novel in 1963 and in 1968 became the first black man to produce and direct a film for a major Hollywood studio. In 1995 Parks donated his work to the Library of Congress because he wanted it "stored under one roof and a roof he could respect." A true Renaissance man, Parks died in March, 2006.

Bruce Davidson

My curriculum unit ends with a more contemporary photographer. Bruce Davidson is the perfect choice. Davidson has a strong interest in kids and coming of age issues. This is partly due to that fact that he was raised by a single mother who worked in a factory. Born in Chicago in 1933 he discovered his love for photography at an early age. He purchased his first camera at 10 from the money he made on his paper route, and was allowed to roam the streets taking snapshots. By 16 he won first prize in the Kodak National High School contest, went on the study at the Rochester Institute of Technology and later at Yale. Davidson has an outstanding collection of work, which runs the gamut from *The Dwarf* to *Central Park* . In between those he studied gang life in Brooklyn and covered the Civil Rights movement.

Davidson spent the spring of 1959 with a group of teenagers who called themselves "The Jokers." He later published this as *The Brooklyn Gang Project* . He gained access to them through a social worker and then spent months and months hanging out with them. Of this time Davidson said, "My way of working is to enter an unknown world, explore it over a period of time, and learn from it. I was 25 and they were about 16. I could easily have been taken for one of them... I found myself involved with a group of unpredictable youths who were mostly indifferent to me. In time they allowed me to witness their fear, depression and anger. I soon realized that I, too, was feeling some of their pain. In staying close to them, I uncovered my own feelings of failure, frustration, and rage."

One of the more powerful images from this project is a photograph *Kathy reflected in Cigarette Machine* (www.museum.icp.org/exhibitions/davidson). It is probably taken in Coney Island as there is a carnival like atmosphere in the background. In the foreground is a young man rolling up his cigarette pack in his T-shirt sleeve. Kathy, I would assume, is his girlfriend. They have just purchased a pack of cigarettes and while he is putting the pack away she is taking a moment to see how she looks in the glare reflected off the machine. She has her left arm up on top of her head, much like the classic Hollywood pin up girls did. She is just checking to make sure she is sexy. The boy knows he's sexy because he just bought cigarettes. I am forever amazed by the allure of cigarettes and teenagers. Of course I am not the only one captivated by this image. There are entire movies devoted to maintaining the sexiness of smoking. Davidson's subjects all have this James Dean quality, the alienated rebel without a cause, the isolated teenager whom no one understands. The lonely kid who must, at all cost, look tough.

Another photo from this collection is of two teenagers kissing in the back seat of a car. It is an amazingly romantic picture. They are in the backseat, and the boy has his back to the driver and the girl is lying down in front of him. He is holding her up and kissing her.

We can just barely see the driver's ear in the front and out the back window is the highway, streaming by. One of my students said "this picture is my favorite. You can tell it's from many years ago yet couples still do the same thing. It's like no matter where you are or who you're with if you really love that person you're not afraid to show your emotions. It looks to me as if these two teenagers are on a road trip with some more of their friends. The photographer found a way of capturing them showing their love for each other in a way most adults would find inappropriate." These pictures are coming of age photos, a subject that students will always be interested in.

Davidson worked for *Life* for a while and then in 1962 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship to photograph the Civil Rights movement. His work from this time included Malcolm X, steel workers, the Ku Klux Klan, and various protest marches

and demonstrations in Alabama. These were all published in a book called *A time of Change* . One particularly striking photo from this series is of two young boys, both black, taking up about half of the frame. The other half is the American flag. The boy in the foreground is wearing overalls and has painted his face white so that he can draw with his finger the word VOTE on his forehead. The other boy is just glaring at the camera. He looks hot, angry and hopeless. ([www.magnumphotos.com/time of change](http://www.magnumphotos.com/timeofchange)). It is striking to see these photographs today in light of the fact that most Americans, both white and black, do not vote at all.

One of Davidson's strongest books is *East 100th street* , published by Harvard University Press in 1970. In the late 60's Davidson chose to photograph only one block in East Harlem. He did this for two years, documenting as many different types of people and places as he could. He went back day after day knocking on doors, asking permission to photograph them. Over the course of time he built trust in the community. The result is a powerful book full of faces; families who like the "rest" of America went to church on Sunday, had barbecues and went to school. It is also full of pictures of tenements and scared and scarred children looking out their back windows onto trash laden backyards. I love these photographs so much because as a teacher in the city I am often asked why

Black people don't rise above their social conditions. Most people don't really want the answers; they just like to ask the question. The problem is not race. The problem is racism.

One of the photographs from this collection is of a young couple on their rooftop. It is called *Spanish Harlem* (

www.magnumphotos.com). They are sitting on some sort of beam that goes across the roof. Behind them is the skyline of Manhattan. She is wearing a skirt and a tank top. He is wearing black jeans and a black shirt. She is wistful looking, thinking of far off places perhaps, while he is staring straight at the camera, smoking a cigarette, and is either a tough guy or putting on the face of a tough guy. One hopes that she won't get pregnant or in any way trapped in East Harlem, but the viewer knows her chances are slim, as well as his chances, although he seems content with the "thug life."

Another photo from *East 100th street* is of a young father holding up his twin girls. They are wearing fluffy pretty dresses and the father is obviously proud. There are shallow little windows in the background but the family has a lot of plants that are all thriving. In the corner are a TV set and a record player. It is a photograph of normal family life. Tupac Shakur, when questioned about why black people live in such terrible surroundings, said black people are afraid too. There just isn't enough money to move. In fact they are more afraid he said, than we are, because they have to live right there with the violence and the drug dealers.

I will end with Davidson's book *Central Park* , because it is this book that so captivated my class. It was completed in 1993 after four years of work. Once again Davidson devoted himself to this project, coming back day after day, regardless of the weather. Because of this he ends up with an array of photographs taken from the fall, through the winter, into the spring and summer. He was considered a man with a quest.

"There's a truth about Central Park I'm trying to uncover." I understand that quest having spent the whole decade of the 1970's trying to find peace in it. I was a country girl driven to go to New York at 17, and I never found any peacefulness there. I was always amazed by the people who did. Most of them were already city people. I never once found an outsider who considered Central Park peaceful. I think this is one of the reasons I love these photographs. His subjects do look peaceful, but always in the background looms one of the world's largest cities. This was probably why this book was one of my students' favorites because they, too, are city kids looking for some kind of peace in nature.

One of their favorite pictures from this collection is of a young couple who are kissing while sitting on a fence underneath the fall trees. It is taken from below and with a fish eye lenses perhaps because the effect is such that the couple appear to be in a circle enveloped by the trees and by their love for one another (Davidson, *Central Park* , p. 49). My students said that "it is a picture of two homosexual men in the park kissing and spending quality time together. I think that he took this picture to show that

even though they aren't like the average female and male couple they still do the same things and show the same affection toward each other."

One photo that we all shared an equal affection for is of a young Hispanic couple kissing at the edge of the park. (Davidson, *Central Park* , p.20) He is holding her face with his right hand and bringing her down to kiss him. She is a willing participant. She has long dark hair and clearly enjoys his attention. Directly to their left is a white couple dressed in their wedding outfits. Hers is a fancy, expensive wedding dress. She is carrying a bouquet, and her veil is tied behind her head. He has on a white shirt, dark black tuxedo, shined shoes, and those little squinty investment banker glasses. It is obvious they come from money. She is staring ahead, while he is looking directly at the couple kissing. One immediately understands that there is more passion between the Hispanic kids than with this match made at Smith Barney.

Through Davidson's work we get glimpses into a variety of people, and places. Since he has done a lot of photographs of teenagers, students will really be able to relate to his work.

Lesson Plan One/Family photo

Before we start analyzing some of the world's most famous photos I will start with an assignment that is less daunting. Each child must bring in a photograph of their family. It is less daunting because everyone has a family photo and everyone can say something about it. It is a good way for students to get to know each other. It is totally open to them what they picture they choose to bring in. I ask only that they be in the picture. It can be of any time period, any event, or quite simply, a snapshot. I have done this project before as a way for kids to get to know each other. Some kids brought in a photo from their 8th grade graduation, some brought in posed family photos taken at Sears, while others brought in worn and cherished little snaps of themselves with a younger brother, perhaps.

Students should tape the photo onto a larger piece of paper and write their analysis of it under the photo. These are nice to hang up in the classroom as a reminder that we all came from somewhere and we all share common themes in our lives. I also participate in this project in order to humanize myself a bit. I have found that kids like to know a little something about their teacher. It helps break down barriers and create a more comfortable space between us.

Then each student should try to analyze their relationship to their family using the photo they have. The following questions will be helpful:

- Who is in the picture with them?
- Where is the picture taken?
- What is their relationship with the person in their photo?
- How old were they in the photo?
- What memories both good and bad does the photograph hold for them?
- Why did they choose this photo?
- Some photo interpretation should be encouraged as well. For example if someone has their arm around them is it out of protection or out of trying to hold them into the family. They may analyze their entire relationship to their family or just focus on their emotions on the day the picture was taken.

Lesson Plan 2/Compare and Contrast photographs

Compare and contrast photographs using Gordon Parks *American Gothic* and Margaret Bourke-White's *In the Time of the Louisville Flood*.

Discuss the American Dream. What do students think it means? Let students raise their hand and write down a variety of answers on the blackboard. Ask questions such as; what group or groups of people are allowed to participate in it? Are there some groups who aren't allowed? Are there some groups who have more rights than others?

Then hand out copies of Bourke-White's *In the Time of the Louisville Flood*, and Gordon Parks , *American Gothic*, both available online. Let the students explore them at their desk. Then starting with Bourke-White's photo ask them

- How many people are in the photo?
- What expressions do the people have on their faces?
- What looms in the background?
- Does it remind them of any current weather catastrophes?
- Are there any white people in line?
- Why are the people in line?
- In what way does the billboard behind them mock or make fun of the American Dream?
- What do they think was the point Bourke-White was trying to make when she took this photo?

After spending quality time looking and writing about *In the time of The Louisville flood* , hand out *American Gothic* , along with a copy of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* . Ask similar questions such as:

- Who is in this photo?
- How old do you think she is?
- What is her job?
- What does it mean that there is an American flag in the background?
- What is the expression on her face?
- In what way is the painting similar to the photo?
- In what way is it different?
- Is the woman in the photo posing?
- What point do you think Gordon Parks is making with *American gothic*?
- How are the two photos similar? How are they different?

Lesson Plan 3/The My Hero Project

The My Hero Project is a free online website www.myhero.com devoted to kids' writing. It was formed by two women who were seeking ways in which their children could identify the true heroes in the world. Their website actively seeks writing by kids on their heroes and helps them identify the qualities of what it means to be a hero. They are particularly seeking writing by teenagers (or younger) in which students identify an unsung hero who often goes unrecognized. This could be someone in their neighborhood or in their family. The website is very user friendly and sets up a 5 paragraph template into which kids can type their work. When finished students may submit the work and it can then be read by anyone on the internet. In other words they will be published writers. There is also a section called *The visual gallery* which accepts drawings and photographs by students.

- Identify what it means to be a hero
- What makes a person have heroic qualities?
- Who is someone you think is a hero?
- Do you know anyone personally who is a hero?
- Of the photographers we studied in this unit who do you think has heroic qualities?

Then each student should go to the computer lab and register onto the website. Using the five paragraph template, they will choose one photographer to write about as their hero and 2-3 examples of their work may be included as well. Once again I can't stress how user friendly this is. The registration process is easy, uploading photos is easy, and saving their work until later is easy. It makes a good project that when finished can be printed out and displayed. It also helps kids identify real heroes and help them move away from just the "rich and famous." .

Annotated Bibliography

Davidson, Bruce. *Central Park* , New York: Aperture Books, 1995. This book is the photographer's vision of Central Park in New York. It is filled with peaceful images and an array and diversity of the people who use the park to play or relax or reflect. It also has a great collection of photographs of teenagers in love. Students like to look at this book.

Freedman, Russell. *Kids At Work: Lewis Hine and the crusade against child Labor/Russell Freedman; with photographs by Lewis Hine*. New York: Clarion Books, 1994. This collection of Hine's work is highly readable and informative. It also contains many of Hine's greatest photographs of child labor. It is an excellent resource for both teachers and students.

Orvell, Miles. *American Photography* , Oxford University Press, 2003. Orvell's book is a great resource for teachers. It begins with the Curriculum Unit 06.01.05

earliest of photography, daguerreotypes, and continues through the Depression, Vietnam and the World Trade Center. It explores a variety of photographers and ideas. It includes landscape photography, photojournalism, and the "new" photographers. It explains, in easily understood detail, how to read a photograph. It is an excellent choice for those who need a way to get their students to discuss a photograph.

Parks, Gordon. *Half Past Autumn* , Organized by the Corcoran Gallery, 1997. This collection of work by Gordon Parks should grace every school library. It is a combination of text and photographs by Parks that covers all phases of his work, from fashion photography, Harlem tenement life, portraits of the rich and famous, to the civil rights movement. It is as well written as it is photographed.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York, Picador, 1973 . This is an intellectual book. It is an existential discussion of photography. Sontag does talk about specific photographers but in addition she teaches us about the meaning of photography and how it has changed our world view and the way we interact.

Stubbs, Marcia and Sylvan Barnet, editors. *The Little Brown Reader* . New York, Harper Collins, 1993. This anthology has been my teacher's handbook for years. In it are a variety of essays on topics ranging from the death penalty to animal rights. The edition I have contains the article "Writing about Family Photographs: Two essays

by First-Year Students", which I used in my first lesson plan. It also contains "Thinking about Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*, Nipomo, California.

Student sources

Briski, Zana. *Born Into Brothels; Photographs by the Children of Calcutta* . New York, Umbrage Editions, 2004. This book contains all of the children's work who were part of Briski's project in India. It has examples of their work and biographies and information about the children. Since it is a photography book of pictures taken by kids it helps students see what kind of work other kids did.

Eldon, Dan. *The Journey is The Destination*. San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1997. Dan Eldon was an aspiring photojournalist who kept his photographs as a journal. While on assignment in Somalia, at the age of 22, he was stoned to death. His book was published posthumously after his death, by his mother. This amazing book helps students see that using photos can be an interesting way to keep a journal.

Hare, Deborah . *Homeboys* , The New Haven Foundation, 1993. This is a collection of 17 interviews I did with young boys from New Haven. I took a year off from work and just hung out with kids. I chose to interview boys because at that time our school had lost 4 kids to shootings. I wanted to understand what was happening. I chose kids from a wide and diverse group. I collaborated with photographer Dru Nadler who took striking portraits of them. The interviews are readable and young kids can easily relate to this violence that happened 13 years ago and, unfortunately, continues today.

Parks, Gordon. *The Learning Tree*. Ballantine Books, 1963. This semi-autobiographical novel by Parks is about his life in Kansas as a young boy. It shows the complete division between the black and whites, is full of thought provoking incidents. Some of these incidents are racial and some are about the meaning of family and the importance of community. It would be a good book to read while studying his collection of the photographs he took of Kansas.

Visual or online sources

The My Hero Project. This free online website www.myhero.com is devoted to student writing. It was formed by two women, Jeanne Meyers and Rita Stern, who were seeking ways in which their children could identify true heroes in the world. They were concerned about rock stars and athletes being identified as the only heroes for kids. Their website actively seeks writing by kids and helps them identify the qualities of a hero. They are particularly seeking writing in which a student identifies unsung heroes who do great things that go unrecognized, possibly someone in their neighborhood or in their family. The website is very user friendly and sets up a 5 paragraph template into which kids can type their work. When finished students may submit the work and it can then be read by anyone on the internet.

DVD / *Half Past Autumn* is a companion piece that goes with Parks' book of the same name. It is very insightful as it explains many of the photos in the book but teachers beware, in addition to being powerful it is also very sad.

DVD/ *Born Into Brothels* is the documentary done by Zana Briski on how photography helped change the lives of the children who were born into brothels in Calcutta, India. It also is an excellent companion piece to the photography book of the photographs taken by these kids.

Both DVDs are available at [www. Amazon. Com](http://www.Amazon.Com), or on www.netflix.com

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