

For All the World to See
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Faculty Guide

The exhibition *For All the World to See* focuses on the visual culture that surrounded the historic Civil Rights movement. Rather than creating a historic account, it explores how imagery impacted the struggle for racial equity. This guide can be used as a starting point for a self-guided tour or assignment.

Pre-Tour

To prepare for a visit to the exhibition, faculty may ask students to consider personal, societal, and literal meanings for some key terms:

Racism	Stereotype
Tokenism	Cultural representation
Activism	Violence

Also, please note that this exhibition contains some images that may be challenging, including the 1955 photograph of Emmett Till in the casket.

During your Visit

For All the World to See explores visual culture by highlighting a few key themes. Below you will find a brief summary of each theme, related questions to consider, and a prompt for a conversation about today's visual culture and climate.

Theme 1: Racist Imagery

Early 20th-century images and visual elements frequently featured African Americans as only the most egregious stereotypes. These ubiquitous portrayals affirmed white Americans' assumptions about black people and empowered the implementation of Jim Crow laws.

- When you look at the stereotypical images, think about who these images were made for. What was the motive for the marketers or media creators? What might the impact be on a viewer of color versus a white person?
- What are the stereotypes you see? How do images reinforce them? What is missing?
- Consider the impact of only seeing a particular group of people (or yourself) through the lens of stereotypes. What impact might that have on your perception?
- Do these stereotypes exist today? What contemporary images or portrayals in culture support those ideas? What images and visual ephemera defy them?

From Today: Consider an ad campaign for two similar products. What do the people featured in the campaign look like? Why were those performers or models chosen? Who is the marketer trying to reach and why? What stereotypes or assumptions are being made about the consumer?

Theme 2. Self-Representation

Early on in the Civil Rights movement, activists understood the power of images and the need for African Americans to have their own voice and to see the reality of their lives in print. The pioneer of black media, John H. Johnson, had correctly stated that there was a “white out on positive black news.” He and others observed that on the rare occasion that African Americans were portrayed in the white media, the stories were only negative or served to confirm stereotypes. In response, he and others in the African-American community created publications that had positive images of upwardly mobile African Americans, showed black cultural contributions, and filled the gap created by the lack of representation. Black media also expressed a much more forceful, harsh portrayal of racism and Jim Crow, fueling the fight for equity.

- Where do you go for information? Who is writing that content? What might their motivation be?
- What media outlets are active today that seem to be for a specific community?
- Consider the ways in which you describe yourself verses how others may see you. What would be left out? What would be included?

From Today: *Vogue* magazine’s highest sales month historically has been September. This year, the September issue will feature Beyoncé Knowles. The photographer is the first African American to be assigned the cover feature in the magazine’s 126-year history. Compare this image of Beyoncé to her previous *Vogue* covers. How does the portrayal change? How does it stay the same? What about her appearances on *Vogue* verse those on *Ebony*, a black lifestyle magazine? How are other black women portrayed on the covers of *Vogue* and *Ebony*?

Theme 3. Bearing Witness

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activist and organizer, Joyce Landers, once stated, “If they did it to him, they can do it to us.” She was referring to the murder of Emmett Till, a boy from the northern United States who visited the Jim Crow South and was subsequently murdered by white supremacists. The publication of a photo of Till’s mutilated body had a profound impact on society. It enraged many in black communities and inspired a generation of activists. Mamie Till Bradley’s decision to publish the photo of her son’s body and its inclusion in this exhibition asserts that, in order to move people out of complacency, visual imagery has to show the horror and violence caused by racism.

- What if any, have images of violence in contemporary media had a similar impact in society?
- What channels of communication have changed how we consume visual culture?
- What happens when we can no longer trust an image as factual? What can take its place?

From Today: Consider the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice. How were the people involved on each side of these stories portrayed by the media? How did images impact society's reaction to these stories? How did the reaction of one community differ from another? What was or would the response have been had there not been a visual record? Compare those portrayals across media outlets. Compare the trajectory of those stories to that of Emmett Till's murder.

Theme 4. Race and the Age of Television

Television was an incredibly powerful medium in the mid-1900s as it brought moving visual imagery into homes for the first time. The complexity of portraying race was an immediate part of the conversation. Some television shows played in to racist stereotypes while others directly challenged them. Still other TV shows started with intentions to defy racism, but devolved into stereotypes for the sake of comedy or to play to the lowest common denominator to reach a broader audience. Advertisers also wanted to avoid controversy and reach as broad an audience as possible. They thereby had a major influence content.

- Compare the TV Guides from the 50s to the 70s. How are black people portrayed?
- Television often told its most complex stories by defaulting to white as the race when casting performers. Conversely, portrayals of black people often relied on tokenism and shallow representation. Where do you see evidence of this? Where is this norm challenged? Who is making the decisions for casting and writing the shows? Who are the actors? Why were they chosen?
- Consider the trajectory of a famous TV show that featured a predominantly black cast. What stereotypes do you see? What racist ideas were challenged and how?

From Today: The internet and especially social media has changed the way we consume visual culture in a profound way. What has the relatively new technology done for social movements? How has it helped and or hurt those movements? What are some examples? How has it impacted our entertainment? Where do you see contemporary comedy and drama relying on stereotypes? Where is racism being challenged in entertainment?

Theme 5. Black Power

The exhibition ends by exploring cultural movements that paralleled the historic Civil Rights movement. Artists like Elizabeth Catlett and Emory Douglas provided powerful creative images that complimented with the work of the writers and community organizers. Also, the new accessibility of home cameras allowed the everyday person the chance to document their own lives and existence.

From Today: Consider contemporary artistic movements. Where are the creative voices that challenge the status quo and inequity? How are communities expressing their voice? How is this reflected by (or left out of) mainstream culture? Access to self-representation and personal documentation is easy now. In fact, it is almost universal. How might that be changing the media landscape?

Beyond the Exhibition

This conversation has centered on the experience of African Americans in the United States. However, that is not the only community of color that has been impacted by racist visual culture or has fought for equity by trying to employ self-representation. Consider another group of people that has been impacted by exclusion, bigotry, or marginalization. Revisit this conversation and the questions above with that community in mind.

Today our media consumption is significantly more reliant on imagery than it has ever been, even in the 1900s. Think about ways we produce and circulate images now. How does it impact our conversations about race and identity? What are positive outcomes and what are negative outcomes?

Suggested Bibliography

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