

The Whole World Was Watching: Civil Rights-Era Photographs from Edmund Carpenter and Adelaide de Menil

A look at the role of photography in affecting social change

**On view March 5 – September 25, 2011 at the Menil Collection
and the Gregory School African-American Library**

**PUBLIC OPENING SATURDAY, MARCH 5, 2011:
2:00–4:00 P.M. AT THE GREGORY SCHOOL
4:00–6:00 P.M. AT THE MENIL**



Houston, February 2, 2011 – The Menil Collection is proud to present **The Whole World Was Watching**, a selection of works from an extraordinary gift of more than 200 Civil Rights-era photographs from Edmund Carpenter and Adelaide de Menil.

The exhibition will be on view for nearly seven months, from March 5 through September 25, at two venues: the Menil and the African-American Library at the Gregory School in Houston's historic Freedman's Town.

Through the work of renowned photographers Bob Adelman, Dan Budnik, Bruce Davidson, Elliott Erwitt, Leonard Freed, and Danny Lyon, the exhibition revisits the profound social and political changes that swept the United States in the 1950s and 60s. These images

document the nation's struggle for racial equality, while also demonstrating the power of photography to raise consciousness and mobilize social movements.

In the media-saturated landscape of post-WWII America, "the whole world is watching" became a rallying cry that propelled leftist activist groups to use the power of the press to disseminate images and information about social injustice. Television, news magazines and daily newspapers disseminated shocking images of violence and racial injustice, including hostile confrontations at sit-ins and other protests for civil rights

organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

Organized by Menil associate curator Michelle White and Danielle Burns, curator at the Houston Museum of African American History and the African American Library at the Gregory School, **The Whole World Was Watching** includes a wide variety of striking images that deal with race and politics: marchers on the road from Selma to Montgomery, Dr. Martin Luther King on the Washington Mall, voters at polling places, cotton workers in the Mississippi Delta, confrontations with the Ku Klux Klan, and everyday evidence of segregation.

These photographs record not only triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement such as King's "I Have a Dream" speech, but also the lesser-known conditions from which the struggle was borne.

Extraordinary works of art in their own right, these photographs create a complex portrait of an era and its actions and activists.

To supplement the exhibition professor Gerald O'Grady, fellow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University, and founder of the Rice University Media Center, will organize a summer film series of important films of the Civil Rights era. He will also give a lecture on how the then-new forms of film and photography in the 1960s served as such critical tools for advocating social change.



Also in commemoration of the anniversary, PBS stations nation-wide will broadcast in May Stanley Nelson's "American Experience: Freedom Riders", a two-hour documentary based on Raymond Arsenault's book *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Bob Adelman (1931-)

Bob Adelman studied photography in the late 1950s under the tutelage of famed *Harper's Bazaar* art director Alexey Brodovitch. Raised on Long Island, New York, Adelman used his background as a graduate student in Applied Aesthetics from Columbia University to forge close ties with leading figures of art and literature, including Andy Warhol and Samuel Becket. In the early 1960s, Adelman volunteered his time as a photographer for the Committee on Racial Equality (CORE), a position that granted him access to Civil Rights Movement's key leaders, including Malcolm X, Martin

Luther King, Jr. and James Baldwin.

Dan Budnik (1933-)

Known for his intimate portraits of New York School artists such as Lee Bontecou, Robert Rauschenberg, and David Smith, photographer Dan Budnik began his career working for Magnum Photos, the prestigious photographic agency behind some of the most iconic images of the 20th century. Born on Long Island, New York in 1933, Budnik studied at the Art Students League from 1951 to 1953 before working for a number of major news magazines including *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *Vogue*. Throughout the first half of the 1960s, he captured the emotion behind some of the most pivotal demonstrations of the Civil Rights Movement.

Bruce Davidson (1933-)

Born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1933, Bruce Davidson began taking photographs at the age of ten, using Chicago street life as his earliest subject. After studying at Rochester Institute of Technology, and then at Yale University under Josef Albers, Davidson joined Magnum Photos in 1958 following two years as a photographer for the US Army in Paris. As an extension of his coverage of the Freedom Riders for the *New York Times*, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1962 to pursue his acclaimed documentary project on the Civil Rights Movement – highlights of which were included in a major solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1963.

Elliott Erwitt (1928-)

Born in Paris to Russian parents in 1928, Elliott Erwitt spend much of his childhood in Italy before moving to the United States with his father in 1939. Completing his studies in photography at Los Angeles City College and in filmmaking the New School for Social Research, Erwitt joined Magnum Photos in 1953 after coming to the attention of organization co-founder Robert Capa. Known for his candid, often humorous portrayals of the everyday – in the tradition of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s spontaneous “decisive moment” images – Erwitt’s photographs of the American South in the 1950s capture the stark reality of segregation with a candor rarely presented at the time.

Leonard Freed (1929-2006)

Born in Brooklyn, New York to Jewish working-class parents of Eastern European descent, Leonard Freed planned to become a painter until discovering photography during a trip to the Netherlands in 1953. After briefly training with Alexey Brodovitch, Freed explored Jewish life in both America and postwar Europe before turning his attention towards the building racial tension throughout the United States. Published in 1969, *Black in White America* would become Freed’s signature work, an examination of the Civil Rights period that favored subtle portraits of everyday life rather than a

concentration on the ongoing confrontations.

Danny Lyon (1942-)

Danny Lyon joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1962 as staff photographer, while studying history at the University of Chicago. Though a self-taught photojournalist, Lyon found himself later that year embarking on a decades-long career as he sat in a jail cell with a number of protesters next to the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. A native of Queens, New York, Lyon travelled with SNCC throughout the South for two years, documenting the violence facing the student-led organization in his celebrated 1964 book, *The Movement*. A pioneering example of photographic New Journalism, Lyon's immersion in the lives of Civil Rights activists offers a unique, often unguarded look at the strain and risk involved in the struggle for equality.

OPENING AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Open House Celebration, and Kick off of community initiative "Freedom Now: Houston Retraces the Civil Rights:"

Saturday, March 5th

Menil Bookstore Deck, 4-6 p.m.

Opening remarks by Reverend William A. Lawson; a performance of Freedom Songs by Heritage of Zion Quartet; music by Tierney Malone, tours of the exhibition.

***Tour de Hood* Bike Tours**

Saturday, March 26th and May 14th

8:30 a.m

Join us for a 2 ½ hour bike tour of Civil Rights-Era Houston led by community activist Lenwood Johnson and organized by "Tour de Hood." Stops include the Gregory School, Texas Southern University and Emancipation Park, among other historical sites in the 3rd and 4th Wards. Refreshments will be provided en route, and at the end of the ride. Bikes and helmets are available on request, and a \$25 donation to Tour de Hood is strongly suggested.

Gallery Talk With Curators

Wednesday, May 11th and June 2nd at Noon.

Michelle White (Menil Collection) and Danielle Burns (Gregory School) will lead a noontime gallery tour of the exhibition.

Houston Young Writers Reading: The Watchful Eye

Thursday, May 19. 7 p.m.

Writers-In-The-Schools (WITS) has developed a unique program (initiated with the support of The Menil Collection in 1989) in which students visiting the museum write

poetry and prose inspired by the work on view. In this program, student will read their work inspired by the photographs in *The Whole World Was Watching*.

The Whole World Was Watching Film Series curated by Gerald O' Grady, with an Introductory Lecture July 2011

Gerald O'Grady, former fellow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard, and founder of the Rice University Media Center, will curate four evenings of civil rights era films, and lecture on how film and photography did, became critical tools for bringing about social change in the 1960s.

Dan Budnik, *Selma to Montgomery March. Will Henry 'Do-Right' Rogers being saluted by a sergeant of the Alabama National Guard, Gardner Farm Road, Lowndes County, Alabama* © Dan Budnik, 1999. The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Edmund Carpenter and Adelaide de Menil. Photo: Hester + Hardaway Photographers Fayetteville Texas

Dan Budnik, *March On Washington. Martin Luther King Jr. moments after delivering his 'I HAVE A DREAM' speech, Lincoln Memorial, 1963 (Aug. 28)* ©Dan Budnik, 1999. The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Edmund Carpenter and Adelaide de Menil. Photo: Hester + Hardaway Photographers Fayetteville Texas

**This exhibition is in partnership with the year-long community initiative,
"Freedom Now: Houston Retraces the Civil Rights Movement."**

www.freedomnowhouston.org.

This exhibition is generously supported by Mark Wawro and Melanie Gray, Roy and Evelyn Nolen, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Fulbright & Jaworski L.L.P., Goldman, Sachs & Co., Michael Zilkha and the City of Houston.

**For more information write to press@menil.org or call 713-523-3170
www.menil.org**