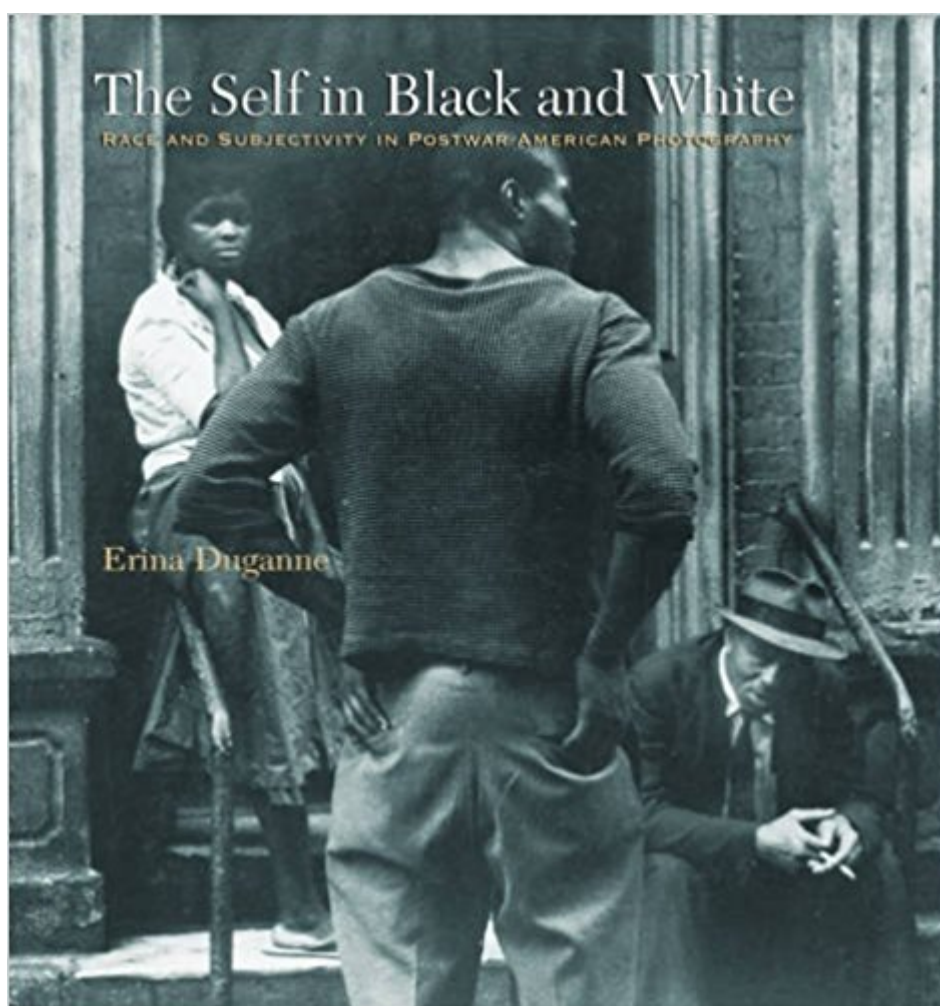


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The Self In Black And White: Race And Subjectivity In Postwar American Photography (Interfaces: Studies In Visual Culture)



Synopsis

The Self in Black and White is a fascinating and original study of the ways in which notions about race and the self were formed, perpetuated, and contested in American photography during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, with an emphasis on images of the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty. Author Erina Duganne opens with a discussion of the Kamoinge Workshop, an African American photographers' collective from the 1960s. She goes on to discuss the 1965 government-sponsored photography exhibition "Profile of Poverty" which sought to stir up emotional support for the War on Poverty via "documentary" images of poverty and race. She analyzes the complex interconnections of race and artistic subjectivity through a comparison of the careers of Bruce Davidson, who was often praised for the artistic merit of his civil rights images, and Roy DeCarava, who was singled out for the "authenticity" of his Harlem photographs. The Self in Black and White is a compelling interdisciplinary consideration of the eye behind the camera and the formative power it wields.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The book skillfully unveils and analyzes binary aspects of photographs, such as positive/negative messages and outsider/insider perspectives. . . .

Recommended. Choice

“Erina Duganne brilliantly illuminates mutually constructed and intersubjective representations of race as it was - or seemed to be - embodied by black subjects in post-WWII documentary work by African American and European American photographers. This is a vivid, vital and exciting book, that opens new avenues for scholarship.” (Laura Wexler, author of *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, Professor of American Studies and Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies, Yale University)

“In this perceptive and well-argued book, Erina Duganne offers a refreshing take on the politics of race, both cultural and personal, in American photography after World War II. With clarity and grace, it helps us to see the complex social motivations, anxieties, and biases that lie below the surface of seemingly straightforward images.” (Maurice Berger, Senior Research Scholar, University of Maryland, Baltimore County)

Erina Duganne’s *The Self in Black and White: Race and Subjectivity in Postwar American Photography* presents a genuinely new idea and points in innovative analytical directions in a well argued, watertight end-run around post-structuralism. Although Duganne does make ample room for subjective, culturally informed reading of images, in every instance she includes the photographer as the a priori subjective producer of images to be read. Tidy, balanced, and very, very good, *The Self in Black and White* simultaneously rejects essentialism and limits the impact of theory-driven reading of images while revealing its author to be fearless when approaching the subject of race (or rather skin color) and photography. From chapter one, “Beyond the ‘Negro Point of View’: The Kamoinge Workshop’s ‘Harlem’ Portfolio,” Duganne thoroughly demolishes a politically explosive topic, that there can be a “Negro” (or Caucasian) “Point of View” at all, while maintaining respect for important representational concerns, both historical and philosophical, that underlay such an assertion. To limit visual understanding of an ethnic group to those who share the same line of difference is to create a photographic caste: if only African Americans can portray “black” culture accurately, it follows that only European Americans can portray “white” culture accurately. Duganne sets the stage for her integrationist approach by declaring boldly that the opposite of essentialism is unabashed subjectivity--the first person. Photographs belong to the photographer who makes them, and the creator’s honesty and sincerity are far more important attributes in making and reading them than spurious objectivity.

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