

### Assignment 3

Read Susan Sontag's essay, *America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly* and respond.

Explain what Sontag means when she writes that Walker Evans' photos "confer importance" and "democratize" their subjects through "leveling up." In Sontag's view, how did the MOMA exhibitions, *The Family of Man* and the retrospective of Diane Arbus' work differ? What differences in American culture between the 1950s and the 1970s did these exhibitions reveal in Sontag's perspective? How did Diane Arbus choose her subjects, and what were the inherent problems with this method? As a result, how do viewers typically respond to the works and the subjects depicted? Compare an Arbus photo to a photo made by a later artist. What is the general tone in each image and how is this tone constructed? What is revealed in each work?

- or -

Read Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and answer the following questions.

Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* perceptively anticipates and defines important artistic concerns of the 20th century just as photography became readily available to the masses via the hand-held camera and modern reproduction technologies. How does Benjamin define the "aura" of a work of art? To what does the aura, and "art," depend? What did technical/mechanical reproduction "emancipate" the work of art from? Once art ceases to relate to this, what are the negative consequences and benefits of this freedom? In other words, according to Benjamin, how did photography "transform the entire nature of art?" Discuss a photo made after 1980 that demonstrates the ideas, transformations, and consequences that Benjamin predicted.

- or -

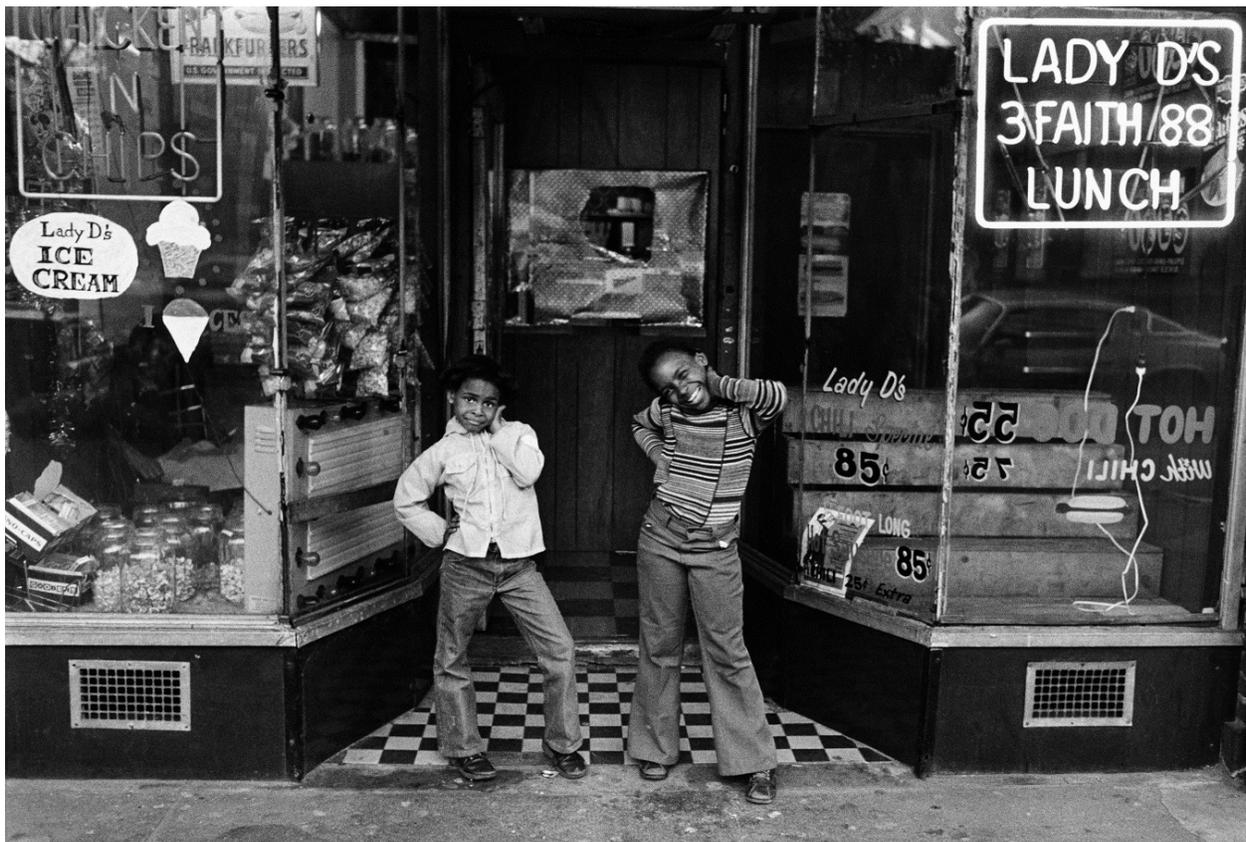
Read the Getty Museum's instructional on analyzing photographs at [www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/exploring\\_photographs/background1.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/exploring_photographs/background1.html). Next, browse through your textbook and choose a photograph from any period that piques your interest. Using the Getty's strategy - description, reflection, and formal analysis - analyze your chosen photograph.

**Description** - Begin by describing what you see, drawing the viewer's attention to key elements (objects, subjects, symbols) in the composition. Identify three to five visual elements (subjects, objects, textures, lines, differing contrast, etc.) in the photo.

**Reflection** - Read what your textbook has to say about the photograph and its historical context. What symbolic meaning do they carry? Identify the style and time period in which the photo was made. What does the historical context in which the image was made tell you about the photograph's meaning?

**Formal Analysis** - How do the visual elements of the photo work to build meaning? What connections to historical context, issues of the current period, or concerns of previous eras are connected to what you see?

Finally, use at least two sources discovered in your search to add either alternative perspective to your analysis, or to further develop a point that you are making. Cite your sources using Chicago Manual of Style footnotes (no bibliography).



Dawoud Bey, *Two Girls in Front of Lady D's*, c. 1976.