

### Essay 3

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

Explain what Sontag means when she writes that Walker Evans' photos "confer importance" and "democratize" their subjects by "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 during the 1950s and the 1970s did these exhibitions reveal? According to Sontag, how did Diane Arbus choose her subjects, and what were the inherent problems with this method? Compare a Robert Frank photograph to an Arbus photo. What is the general tone in each image and how is this tone constructed? What does the reveal about America to each of the photographers?

- 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 transformation and consequences that Benjamin predicted.