



SEATTLE — ON THE — SPOT

THE PHOTOGRAPHS
OF AL SMITH
EDUCATOR'S PACKET

About the Exhibit

Al Smith's photography chronicles Seattle's vibrant Central District neighborhood and the city's African American community during the mid-20th century with great warmth and intimacy. *Seattle on the Spot: The Photographs of Al Smith* honors 65 years of Smith's brilliantly expressive documentary photography and celebrates the neighborhood and people who inspired him.

Who was Al Smith?

Al Smith's personal story is as compelling as his photography. Smith grew up at Fifth Ave and Jefferson Street above a grocery store and attended O'Dea High School in Seattle's First Hill neighborhood. After sailing around the Pacific Rim as a steward on merchant vessels, Smith returned to Seattle with a new camera and a desire to capture his home city on film. What started as a hobby soon became an art and a profession. He eventually started taking his hobby more seriously and formed his On the Spot photography side business.

Exhibit Themes

Seattle on the Spot explores the following topics/questions:

- The history of the Central District and defining events for Seattle's African American community in the mid-20th century.
- Seattle's local jazz scene during the 1940s and 50s—the nightclubs, the patrons, the musicians, its significance, and how it was shaped by segregation.
- Who and what makes a community? How are communities remembered?
- What changes have happened and are still happening to Seattle and the Central District?

Seattle on the Spot builds upon all five EALR Components for Social Studies; see content matrix for specific grade-level expectations.

- Civics 1.1.2, 1.4.1
- Economics 2.1.1, 2.4.1
- Geography 3.1.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3
- History 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.3.1, 4.4.1
- Social Studies Skills 5.1.1, 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.3.1

Additionally, *Seattle on the Spot* ties in well to several suggested units for Social Studies, in particular:

- Families in Our Communities (grade 1)
- Participating in Our Community (grade 2)
- Cultures in Our Community (grade 3)
- WA – Great Depression & WWII (grade 7)
- US – Movements & Issues at Home (grade 11)
- CWP – Human Rights (grade 12)

In the Exhibit



Al's Life

Explore the life of the man behind the camera. Al Smith grew up in the Central District and sailed the world as a merchant marine after leaving high school. He returned to Seattle where he started a family and his On the Spot photography business.



The Darkroom

Take a closer look at the analog printing process and the behind the scenes work of On the Spot in this immersive darkroom experience. Learn how photos go from film to print and follow Smith's growth as a photographer and businessman.



The Jazz Scene

Immerse yourself in the historic Jackson Street jazz scene. Hear the music, see the fashion, and learn some the dance moves on display at Seattle's hottest jazz clubs in the 1940s and 50s.



Nightclub Photos

Al Smith started taking photographs on Jackson Street in 1940. He is best known for capturing images of musicians and patrons alike in Seattle's lively jazz scene. These photographs provide a visual record of a chapter that otherwise might have been lost.



Neighborhood Photos

Explore Smith's photography out in the community that captured everyday moments of black pride and relationships in the Central District. Al's photographs reflect his deep connections to family and friends, his church, the arts, sports, and more.



Retrospective Gallery

Al Smith's photographs preserve the memory of a community and world that has been radically transformed, and prompt questions important for us to explore today. Share your own reflections and learn more about local organizations doing important work to preserve the Central District's stories.

Preparing for Your Visit

Book now! MOHAI's field trip calendar fills up quickly. Making a reservation guarantees your class has access to the exhibit, provides a discount on your admission fee, and a brief introduction by a member of our education team. Scholarships and bus reimbursement funds are available to schools that qualify.

Try our new guided program! Hands on History is our newest field trip program, launching Fall 2017. Like all MOHAI school programs, Hands on History is highly-facilitated, inquiry-based, and uses authentic historic materials to investigate the past. The first three topic choices in development are Settling the Sound, Innovation, and Seattle on the Spot. Questions? Email education@mohai.org.

Planning your own activity? Teachers with an existing reservation are welcome to visit the museum in advance of their trip to research and prepare any activities or lesson plans. For tips on how to make the most of your visit, see the In-Gallery Activity Ideas on page 3 or visit www.mohai.org/learn.

Exhibit Vocabulary

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|--------------|
| Amateur | Discrimination | Neighborhood |
| Celebration | Diversity | Photographer |
| Community | Hobby | Professional |
| Composition | Jazz | Race |
| Cropping | Gentrification | Redlining |
| Darkroom | Migration | Segregation |

In-gallery Activities

Tips for Success

The best in-gallery activities encourage students to slow down, use inquiry to look closely at objects, activate prior knowledge, and help them make personal connections to the exhibit. Encourage students to practice history skills by supporting claims and ideas with evidence that they find in the exhibit or in the photographs themselves.

Example Activity Ideas

- Create a list of adjectives that might describe several of the photos presented in the exhibit. Have students find photos they think represent those words, and record their choices through drawings and/or descriptions.
- Use the “How to Read a Photograph” handout to come up with a list of guiding questions for students to answer about their favorite photographs in the exhibit.
- Have students select their favorite photos in the exhibit, and for each one draw a before and after scene. Alternatively, write a one-paragraph story about what’s happening in the photo.
- *Seattle on the Spot* takes a close look at a community at a particular moment in time. Find photos that are similar to Seattle/your community today. Then, find photos that provide evidence that the Central District and/or Seattle has transformed over time.
- How would you “map” out the themes, images, and stories presented to you in the exhibit? Identify the big ideas like community, photography, jazz, etc. on a piece of paper. Around each idea, add sketches of objects, photos, sounds, and other things you noticed in the exhibit, then draw lines that show the relationships between them.
- For older students: take a look at the contributor bios at the end of the exhibit. Can you identify places in the exhibit where their expertise might have shown up?

In-classroom Activities

Prepare for your visit or bring the exhibit back with you into the classroom with one of the following lessons or activity ideas.

In-classroom Activity 1: Community Snapshot (3rd-6th grade)

Warm up: Individually, in small groups, or as a class, create a mind map centered on the word “community”. What does a community look like? Who is a part of our communities? What are community spaces?

If creating mind maps individually or in small groups, have students share out some of the things they added to their mind map and discuss what similarities and differences exist across our own concepts of community.

Getting started: Explain to students that they will now be historians investigating photographs that together, show us a close look at a community in a particular moment in time. These photos were taken in Seattle’s Central District community in the 1950s and 60s, when it was still a predominantly African American neighborhood. Split students into teams and hand each team one of the following photos plus the “How to Read a Photo” question sheet (located in the Appendix).

- Bertha’s Barber Shop, 1958.
- Car representing the local Filipino community at Seafair, ca. 1954.
- Hills Brothers Barbeque, 1953.
- International Fighting Irish football team, 1954.
- Al Smith’s family and friends vacationing on the WA coast, ca. 1960.
- Toddler’s birthday party, ca. 1950.

Look Closely: Give students 15 minutes to look at their photo, record their observations, and discuss their findings with their teammates.

Share: Have each team present their photographs and findings to the rest of the class.

Discuss:

- How do these photos fit into and/or compare to our mind map of a community? Do you see similarities between the communities you see in the photographs and your own?
- What kind of information about the past can we find in photographs? What kind of information is missing from photos?
- If you were to document your community, what types of photos would you take? Who, what places, and events would you photograph?

Background Information

Al Smith's photographs captured everyday moments of black pride and relationships in the Central District. During the 1940s and '50s, Seattle's African Americans were forging a new community and identity amid rapid population growth and increasing discrimination. World War II produced the largest migration of African Americans in the history of the Pacific Northwest. Al's photographs provided insights into a community that had been largely excluded from and ignored by the rest of the city. They document an important part of Seattle's history.

In the early 1900s, when Al was growing up, Seattle's Central District included Asian, white, and black residents. As the nonwhite population increased, many white residents left the area. By the mid-1900s, African Americans constituted most of the Central District's residents. They formed an identifiable, geographic black community. The concentration of African Americans in Seattle's Central District was due in large part to institutional discrimination, such as the practice of redlining. Redlining was the federally sanctioned and locally supported practice of refusing loans or insurance to people who lived in certain areas of the city. The growth and development of this African American neighborhood provided stability, close relationships, and a sense of identity. The Central District would continue to serve as a primary location for African American culture and life throughout the latter half of the 20th century.

Al's photographs reflect his deep connections to family and friends, his church, the arts, sports, and more. As time passed, he became well known in the black community. He always had a camera with him and was often asked to take photos of neighborhood events. The mutual respect between Al and his subjects shines through in his work. The photos capture the genuine warmth, intimacy, and engagement he had with the community.

Extended Photo captions

- *Bertha's Barber Shop, 1958.* Bertha M. Johnson, owner of Bertha's Barber Shop located on 23rd Avenue, with her two male barbers. Beauticians and barbers formed an important part of the Central District's thriving business sector. They put on hairstyle shows, created clubs, and provided hair-care services and education in the neighborhood.
- *Car representing the local Filipino community at Seafair, ca. 1954.* Seafair is an annual summer festival that emerged in the early 1950s and continues today.
- *Hills Brothers Barbeque, 1953.* Robert L. Hills and his brother, Zeb, in front of their Hills Brothers BBQ in the Central District. They served sweet potato pie, spicy sauce on smoked ribs, and white bread and butter through the 1990s.
- *International Fighting Irish football team, 1954.* This youth football team leaving Seattle to play a championship game in Las Vegas. The team was sponsored by the Japanese American Veterans Association and was open to everyone in the neighborhood. Al's son, Butch, was on the team.
- *Al Smith's family and friends vacationing on the WA coast, ca. 1960.* Mildred Mar and her family were lifelong friends of Al's family. The two families enjoyed vacations together, including this Sunday outing at Saltwater State Park on Puget Sound near Des Moines.
- *Toddler's birthday party, ca. 1950.* Al photographed many family events in the neighborhood.

In-classroom Activity 2: Jackson Street After Hours (7th-12th grade)

Warm up: Select a song from the *Seattle on the Spot* soundtrack (located in the Appendix) and play it for the class to listen to. Give students 5 minutes to write down any words that come to mind when listening to the song, plus a description of the setting they imagine this music being played in.

Getting started: Explain to students that they will now be historians investigating photographs that show us a closer look at Seattle's Jackson Street jazz scene in the 1940s and 50s. Split students into teams and hand each team one of the following photos plus the "How to Read a Photo" question sheet (located in the Appendix).

- Basin Street Nightclub, 1945.
- Couple dancing, 1944.
- Duke Ellington Marquee, 1940.
- International Sweethearts of Rhythm, 1944.
- Pete Peterson on tenor saxophone, date unknown.
- Unidentified group at Basin Street, around 1944.

Look Closely: Give students 15 minutes to look at their photo, record their observations, and discuss their findings with their teammates.

Share: Have each team present their photographs and findings to the rest of the class.

Discuss:

- How do these images compare to your scene descriptions we wrote at the beginning?
- What kind of information about the past can we find in photographs? What kind of information is missing from photos? What other types of primary sources would add to our understanding of these photographs?
- What words would you use to describe the local jazz scene as portrayed in Al's photographs? What are other ways that a photographer could represent similar subjects?

Background Information

With an ear for music and an eye for a bright moment, Al Smith started taking photographs on Jackson Street in 1940. Al is best known for capturing images of musicians and patrons alike in Seattle's lively jazz scene.

Seattle's Jackson Street was once *the* place to hear jazz in the Pacific Northwest. From 1937 to 1951, a thriving after-hours scene flourished along Jackson Street, from the International District to 14th Avenue South. The district was particularly lively during World War II. Thousands of soldiers and wartime construction workers—many of them African American—flooded into the city. After work, they jammed clubs to socialize and catch a set by superb local musicians or some of the hottest players in jazz.

Al's photos of the Jackson Street jazz scene show much fellowship and joy, but they don't capture the racial discrimination that shaped the scene. Until 1956, Seattle's musicians' unions were segregated. Elsewhere in the city, people of color were prohibited except on designated nights. Jackson Street was part of the neighborhood and jazz patrons in these photographs came to unwind, listen to music, and share drinks with friends, neighbors, and strangers. In the process, they challenged widely held expectations of race and gender. Societal views of race and class also rendered the activities of local African American jazz musicians invisible to most of the city. Outside the Central District community, no observer documented and few appreciated the growth of Seattle's jazz scene. Without Al's collection of photographs, this significant moment in history may have remained largely hidden.

Extended Photo captions

- *Basin Street Nightclub, 1945.* Guitar player Al Mitchell, bass player Bob Marshall, and an unknown pianist.
- *Couple dancing, 1944.* This young is unidentified, but the admiring crowd around them is a testimony to their jitterbugging skills.
- *Duke Ellington Marquee, 1940.* A marquee for a Duke Ellington concert at the Show Box on First Avenue in April 1940. Ellington and Al knew each other from the performer's many visits. At the time of this photo, the Show Box favored local musicians from the all-white Local 76 union over the mostly black Local 493. However, they began hiring local black musicians as early as 1948—nearly a decade before the two unions merged.
- *International Sweethearts of Rhythm, 1944.* The International Sweethearts of Rhythm at the Black and Tan. The racially integrated Sweethearts started out at Piney Woods School in Mississippi. This important all-female band, composed of schoolgirls, featured some of the best musicians of the era.
- *Pete Peterson on tenor saxophone, date unknown.* Many of the jazz club patrons in the 1940s were soldiers stationed at nearby military bases, especially Camp George Jordan—a segregated US Army facility.
- *Unidentified group at Basin Street, around 1944.*

Additional In-classroom Activity Ideas

- **A Picture's Worth A Thousand Words** – After visiting the exhibit, have students quickly jot down a list of words in response to Al Smith's photographs and compile this into a master list. Then, have students create a poem using only the words in the list (plus common articles, conjunctions, etc.).
- **Past, Present, Future** - Discuss what has changed between past/present Seattle. What do you think future Seattle will look like? What objects are tomorrow's artifacts? Have students draw and/or describe their future Seattle.
- **History Today** – Have students bring in a personal photograph. Randomly assign students a copy of someone else's photo, and have them investigate it as a historical photograph using the "How to Read a Photo" sheet (located in the Appendix). Can they figure out who's photo they received?
- **Community mapping** – Individually or as a class, create a map that shows your favorite places and important resources in your home/school community. Where do people gather, what do people do together, what spaces feel like home?
- **Junk Jam Band** – Make your own musical instruments! A standard jazz band includes a rhythm section (drums, bass, piano) that constructs chords and keeps the beat, plus a horns (saxophone, trumpet, trombone) and vocals section responsible for playing melodies. Box guitars with rubber bands for strings, castanets, kazoos, and drums are all easy to make with recycled materials.
- **Improv** – One of the key elements of jazz is improvisation – making it up as you go along. Jazz is partly planned and partly spontaneous; the musicians interpret the tunes differently each time they play, often in response to each other. Practice elements of group improvisation with classic improv theatre games such as "Yes, And," "Follow the Secret Leader," "What are you doing?" and "Sound Circle/Sound Ball."

MOHAI Resources

- *Seattle on the Spot* exhibit website: www.mohai.org/seattle-on-the-spot
- *Seattle on the Spot: The Photographs of Al Smith* illustrated catalogue. This illustrated catalog with contributions by Jacqueline E. A. Lawson, Howard Giske, Al “Butch” Smith Jr., Paul de Barros and Quin’Nita Cobbins, chronicles the African-American community during the mid-20th century in the Pacific Northwest. Available for purchase in the MOHAI store.
- Sophie Frye Bass Library – The Al Smith collection is housed in the museum’s library, which preserves and provides access to over 3 million historic photographs, as well as manuscripts, maps, books, posters, motion pictures, and printed ephemera. Located within the MOHAI Resource Center in the Georgetown neighborhood of Seattle, the library’s hours are 1-4pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays by appointment. Email library-dl@mohai.org.
- MOHAI Online Photo Archive: search thousands of historic photos from our Library collection. <http://www.mohai.org/research/photo-archive-search>

Additional Resources

Books

- Darroch, Lynn. [Rhythm in the Rain](#)
- De Barros, Paul. [Jackson Street After Hours](#)
- Ford, Jamie. [Hotel on the Corner of Bitter & Sweet](#)
- Garbacik, Jaimee. [Ghosts of Seattle Past](#)
- Isadora, Rachel. [Ben’s Trumpet](#)
- Nelson, Marilyn. [Sweethearts of Rhythm](#)
- Pinkney, Andrea Davis. [Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra](#)
- Taylor, Quintard. [The Forging of a Black Community](#)
- Weatherford, Carole. [Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America](#)

Online

- Blackpast.org – an online reference guide to African American history. www.blackpast.org
- HistoryLink – the free online encyclopedia of Washington state history. www.historylink.org
- Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project – an online collection of articles, essays, oral histories, photographs, and documents pertaining to the history of civil rights and labor movements in Seattle. <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr>
- Seattle Public Library’s Seattle Neighborhood History Project – a starting point for accessing historical information about Seattle neighborhoods from the Library’s special collections and elsewhere. <http://cdm16118.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/home/collection/p16118coll1>
- Seattle Public Library’s Seattle Jazz Archive – oral histories from those who have made a significant contribution to the city’s rich jazz community. <http://cdm16118.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16118coll27>

Seattle on the Spot Partner Organizations

- Black Heritage Society of Washington State - <http://www.bhswa.org/>
- Northwest African American Museum - <http://www.naamnw.org/>
- Shelf Life - <https://www.shelflifestories.com/>
- Photographic Center Northwest - <http://pcnw.org/>
- Neighborhood House - <http://www.nhwa.org/>
- Central District Forum for Arts and Ideas - <https://www.facebook.com/CentralDistrictForum/>
- Langston! - <https://www.langstonseattle.org/>
- Africatown - <http://africatownseattle.com/>

Primary Sources/Worksheets Appendix

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How to Read a Photograph

Learning to “read” photographs is an important part of studying history. By looking carefully at the images in this packet, you will have the opportunity to see history happening through the eyes of people who actually experienced these historic events.

Suggestions for reading and interpreting photographs:

1. Examine the details of the photograph carefully for several minutes and write down everything that you think is important.
2. When describing a photo on paper or out loud, start with the general and become more and more specific.
3. Identify objects’ spatial locations by noting whether they are in the foreground, mid-ground, or background.
4. For complex images with many details, try breaking the image into four quadrants or sections and focus on one at a time.
5. Consider what biases the photographer may have, and their motivations for taking the photo. Look for clues to tell you if the photo was staged or natural.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is happening in the photograph? What is the subject?
2. Who took this photo and why? Where do you think the photographer was standing?
3. What is the setting? Are there any buildings or other structures in the picture? What are they? (Hint: look for clues, such as signs, objects in front of the houses or in the windows, etc.)
4. Are there any people in the photograph? What are they doing? What kind of clothes are they wearing? What emotions might they be feeling?
5. Based on your analysis of the people pictured, is there anything you can guess about their lives?
6. Are there any machines or tools pictured? If so, what kind?
7. Do you see animals in the photograph? If so, why are they there?
8. When and where in the past do you think the photograph was taken? How can you tell? Do you already know anything about this time, place, or event?
9. What might have happened just before and just after this picture was taken?
10. What might be pictured just outside the frame of this photo?
11. Put yourself in the scene pictured. What would you be doing? Imagine what might have happened to you that day.
12. Is there anything else you notice?

Primary Sources for Activity 1 - All photographs are property of the Museum of History & Industry and should be used for educational purposes only. Contact education@mohai.org to request larger images.



Bertha's Barber Shop, 1958.



Car representing the local Filipino community at Seafair, ca. 1954.



Hills Brothers Barbeque, 1953.



International Fighting Irish football team, 1954.



Al Smith's family and friends vacationing on the WA coast, ca. 1960.



Toddler's birthday party, ca. 1950.

Primary Sources for Activity 2 - All photographs are property of the Museum of History & Industry and should be used for educational purposes only. Contact education@mohai.org to request larger images.



Basin Street Nightclub, 1945.



Couple dancing, 1944.



Duke Ellington Marquee, 1940.



International Sweethearts of Rhythm, 1944.



Pete Peterson on tenor saxophone, date unknown.



Unidentified group at Basin Street, around 1944.

Seattle on the Spot Soundtrack

A list of songs you can hear in the exhibit, featuring musicians who were part of the Jackson Street jazz scene of the 1940s and early 50s, like Ray Charles, as well as famous touring musicians who played in Seattle, like Duke Ellington. Charles's song "Rockin' Chair Blues" was penned for the Seattle club.

- "The Birth of a Band"—Quincy Jones
- "Bugle Call Rag"—International Sweethearts of Rhythm
- "Cotton Tail"—Duke Ellington
- "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans"—Louis Armstrong
- "Flying Home"—Lionel Hampton
- "Glow Worm"—Mills Brothers
- "Goin' to Chicago"—Jimmy Rushing with Count Basie
- "Good Lovin' Babe"—Ernestine Anderson
- "G'won Train"—Patti Bown
- "I Nearly Lost My Mind"—Evelyn Williamson with Lionel Hampton
- "The Joint Is Jumpin'"—Fats Waller
- "Lotta Sax Appeal"—Dick Wilson with the Andy Kirk band
- "One O'Clock Jump"—Count Basie
- "Rockin' Chair Blues"—Ray Charles