

Exhibition on Childhood and Alley Life in Washington, D.C.
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[I developed this in-class assignment for a 300-level course, *Building Black Communities*. Students worked collaboratively—in assigned groups of three—with a series of images pulled from the Library of Congress' American Memory web site. In preparation for this assignment, students read and discussed James Borchert's monograph, *Alley Life in Washington*. This assignment also built on a series of exercises that required students to examine the conditions of urban alleys and photography.]

Materials Needed:

- Powerpoint file of photographs of children in alleys in Washington, D.C. shot during 1942 (available through the collection of the Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information (FSA/OWI) on www.loc.gov.)
- computer to run the Powerpoint
- an LCD projector to display the images on a screen or blank wall
- one paper copy of the images for each student group

I provided the students with the following instructions:

You and your group have been asked to join a curatorial team for an exhibition about alley life in Washington, D.C. You have been assigned a portion of the exhibit entitled "Childhood." In order to prepare, you consulted the major monograph on the subject, James Borchert's *Alley Life in Washington*.

You have four items to address: you must select photographs to hang in the gallery; you must compose the captions; and you must write the text panel that introduces the major themes and issues that you will present. The fourth task involves recommendations for a product for a tie-in product to be sold in the museum's gift shop.

You have room for up to seven images. (The museum successfully obtained permissions from the Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division and the estate of photographer, Gordon Parks).

As ever, you and your colleagues should consider the visual argument that you will be making with your choices. At the same time, you should consider the text that will accompany the images.

Which images will you choose?

In what sequence will you hang the images? How will you order them?

What size will you ask for them to be reprinted?

How—if at all—should they be framed and mounted?

Will they be uniform in size? Or will there be variation? Why?

How will you caption the pieces?

(Your museum's policy requires that you must include the title, if known, credit the artist, date the piece, and mention the medium.)

Will you provide other supporting text or captions? What would you suggest and why?

For the introductory text panel, what details about alley life will you include?

Which themes or issues will you emphasize in your exhibition?

Are there other types of materials or images that you would like to include? Why?

Finally, the marketing department requested that you pick one image that will be reprinted on a bookmark to sell as a souvenir in the museum's gift shop. The price point will be \$.50 so that

school groups will be able to afford merchandise from the show. Which image will you recommend and why?

After you decide, pull the 5-7 images from your packet. On each, make notes and list directions about the order, sizes, framing, and text for each image. On a separate sheet, please provide the text and materials for the introductory panel and any other directions or specifications. **Your group will submit this packet to me at the end of the class.**

Each group member should be prepared to report to the whole class about your deliberations and the rationale for selections.