

Kinship & Community:

SELECTIONS FROM THE TEXAS
AFRICAN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE

Kinship & Community: Selections from the Texas African American Photography Archive is organized by the Center for Photography at Woodstock and curated by Nicole R. Fleetwood, independent curator and Professor at New York University. The images in this exhibition made their way to Los Angeles through an unfolding story of curiosity, preservation, and chance. That's the short way of explaining how more than 60,000 African American photographs eventually came into the care of Allan Govenar, owner of the Texas African American Photography Archive. This is not a story about stolen archives or battles over intellectual property. In many ways, it's something quieter—and perhaps a little sadder.

For decades, these photographs sat inside the homes and studios of aging postwar photographers, slowly collecting dust. Not in the way family photo albums are tucked away and revisited over time, but as vast community archives created by photographers who often carried the sole responsibility of documenting Black life in their towns.

They photographed everything: funerals, graduations, church gatherings, labor strikes, rodeos, weddings, and homecomings. These photographers became the visual historians of their communities, preserving moments that might otherwise have gone unseen or unrecorded. As these photographers aged, many of their archives were left vulnerable to disappearance—stored in boxes, closets, and abandoned studios. What survives today does so because someone recognized their value before they were lost.



Rodney Evans (1922–1999) *Photography students, Texas Southern University, Houston, Texas, 1961*

Image 1

In the 1920s, the Teal family operated photography studios throughout Texas. Then, in 1942, they opened a school for Black photographers at a time when these opportunities were largely unavailable at universities that Black students could attend. The framework they established would later evolve into the Texas Southern University School of Photography. A few of the photographers featured in the exhibition were students of the Teals.



Benny Joseph (1924–2018) *Skipper Lee Frazier, KCOH disc jockey, and go-go girls, Houston, Texas, 1965*

Image 2 Image 3

These photographs of KCOH are not only important historical images, but also examples of what curator Nicole R. Fleetwood describes in the exhibition catalog as “Black media infrastructure.” During segregation in Texas, Black communities were largely excluded from mainstream media and dominant channels of communication. In response, they created their own newspapers, radio stations, and information networks—spaces where Black life could be represented on its own terms. When KCOH first went on the air in 1953, it was the only Black-owned radio station in Texas. Although the station initially broadcast only during daytime hours, it quickly became a vital cultural beacon for Houston’s Black community.



Benny Joseph (1924–2018) *Club Matinee, Houston, Texas, 1957*

Stations like KCOH circulated information that was often inaccessible elsewhere: news about the Civil Rights Movement, local events, Black entertainers, church announcements, and community concerns. For many listeners, these outlets were not just sources of entertainment but essential tools for connection, visibility, and survival. Seen through this lens, these photographs document more than a radio station. They capture a larger network of Black cultural production and communication—one built collectively in the face of exclusion.