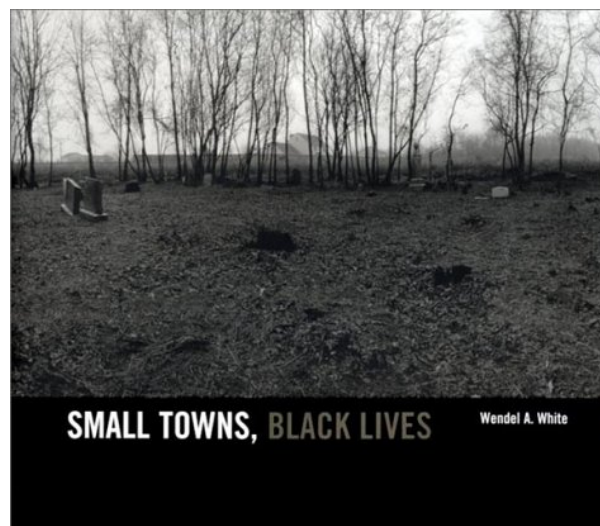
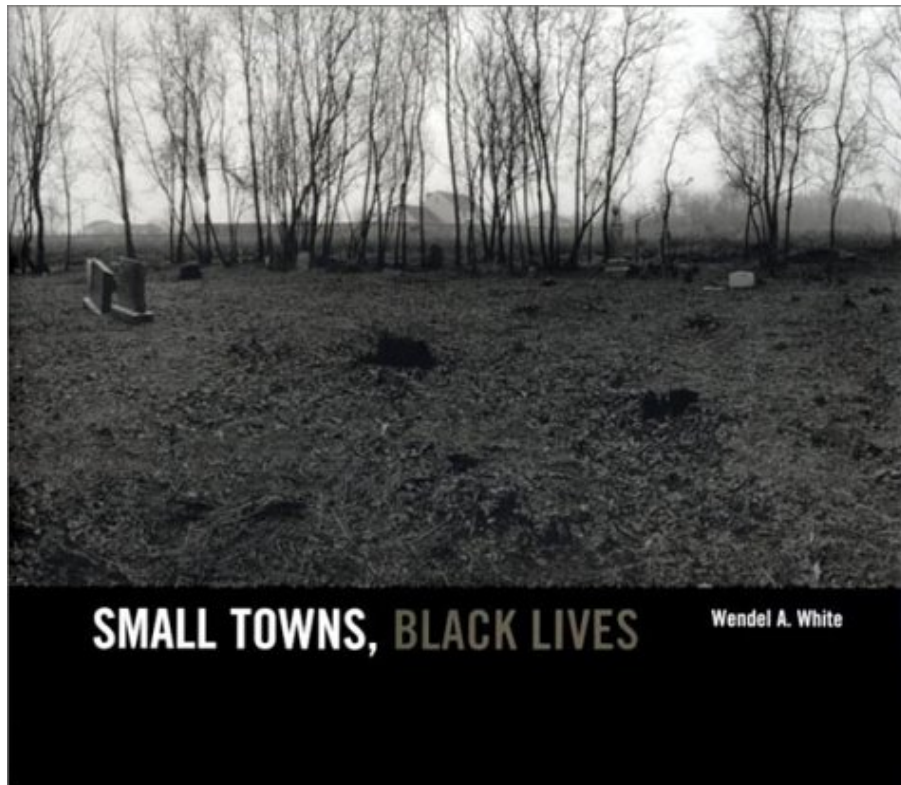


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A single photographic print may be "news", a "portrait," "art," or, "documentary," or any of these, all of them, or none. Among the tools of social science graphs, statistics, maps, and text documentation by photograph now is assuming place.

Dorothea Lange, 1940

The photographs in Wendel White's Small Towns, Black Lives are the kinds of hybrids Lange described and anticipated in her statement. The exhibition and book form a personal album revealing the layers of meaning and history that he carefully uncovered. His project to document African American communities in southern New Jersey began in much the same way that many photographers before him had set out to record a place or people.

Neither stridently documentary nor self-consciously arty, White's images straddle two worlds. They adopt the cool reserve of certain recent fine art photographers – Lewis Baltz, for example. Yet he is also true to the sincere lens of many of photography's great documentarians—such as Lange or Jacob Riis, who documented the horrid slum conditions in New York's Lower East Side or Lewis Hine, who took part in the influential Farm Security Administration documentary project from 1937 to 1942. White has produced a body of work that is uniquely personal and profoundly informative. His photographs thoughtfully ask us to look without preconceptions at the history he has uncovered.

Charles Ashley Stainback, Curator

- Sales Rank: #2214164 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Noyes Museum of Art
- Published on: 2003-01-01
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 2
- Dimensions: 10.50" h x 11.50" w x .75" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 184 pages

Features

- Used Book in Good Condition

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A Significant and Beautiful Work

By ken tompkins

Wendel White's *_Small Towns, Black Lives_* is a significant and beautiful book.

It is significant because White has revealed a little-known fact of American life: that African-Americans occupied private places not easily found on maps and, further, he has exposed the success of those lives in those places. The work is filled with incredible photographs of black schoolteachers, barbers, funeral directors and farmers who built their own homes, gardened their land, sold their produce, raised their families and taught their children. They did all of this in small towns generally unnoticed by the larger society. A metaphoric example is telling. On page 97, White has photographed a tiny cemetery headstone covered with brush, fence posts and the flotsam of an uncaring society. On the next page, after the abandoned cemetery has been cleared, White again photographs the tiny headstone only, this time, it stands surviving and dignified. White has uncovered black lives which, seen through his eyes, stand revealed as surviving and incredibly dignified in their simplicities.

The work is beautiful because of the stark power of his vision of how a photograph and text can be united in reflecting the lives of those he portrays. Struggling to express both the present state and the historic subtext of these places and these lives, Wendel White fuses text and picture into a whole thing. White, whose career as a photographer is long and varied, has found that digital art has opened new possibilities. Each print of this text has been carefully and thoroughly shaped in digital media so that subtlety of black and white tones underpin the subjects of the picture itself. For me, the photographs of the old, segregated schools and abandoned black churches speak volumes of the textures of the lives that learned and worshipped in those places. They reveal the beauty of what survives and the sadness of what we have all lost in their passing.

As I said, this is a significant and beautiful work; it touches all of us and, in doing that, preserves what was almost lost.

kt

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Thought Evoking and Visually Stunning

By Ronald J. Quinn

I found *Small Towns, Black Lives* to be visually stunning, historically intriguing and extremely thought evoking. This book invites the reader to discover, vicariously through an artist's personal journey and experience, black communities in Southern New Jersey. The beautifully captivating black and white photographs of people, buildings and meaningful landscapes are juxtaposed with thoughtful and informative text, which discreetly reveals these small communities to the reader. The photographs also appear to hint at volumes of dormant historical facts and information that has been unearthed and gathered by Wendel A. White. Both photographs and text provide a glimpse into the lives of a community that otherwise may have been overlooked. The essays in the book provide unique points of view from highly regarded educators,

writers and artists as well as "food-for-thought" for the reader. The essays also provide supplementary resources of history and understanding in conjunction with what Wendel A. White has revealed of Small Towns, Black Lives.

I highly recommend Small Towns, Black Lives and urge that it be placed in classrooms, on coffee tables, and anyplace else where people can sit back and enjoy what unfolds from page to page.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

BEAUTIFUL!!!

By Coffy6

When I opened this book, I got chills. The church I attended as a child with my grandmother in Swedesboro, NJ is one of the pictures in this book. My mother cried as she looked through this book. It brought back so many memories of her upbringing in South Jersey. Her neighbor in Trenton NJ is even featured in the book as a Civil War Re-enactor whose group still frequently performs in South Jersey. The photos in this book are beautiful and candid. This was truly a "homecoming experience" for my family. This book is a testament to the many African-American men and women who lived full, productive, and wholesome lives in these often forgotten small towns. Looking at the pictures of the old black churches, I can almost hear the hymns being sung. Thank you Wendel White for this lovely trip down memory lane.

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