

# Activity 6: Behind the Lens

Think about different types of photographs and their purpose



Photograph of unknown (1959) Rosa Parks mug shot following her arrest, by Montgomery Police Department, February 21st, 1956. Available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/philipjohnson/243105653/in/photostream/> (Accessed: 8 March 2023). Licensed under Creative Commons – Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic – CC BY-NC 2.0

Provide a variety of photographs from the Civil Rights Movement and ask the students to get into pairs or groups of 3 or 4. Ask the students to then divide the photos into groups depending on what kind of photograph they think it is – essentially who was taking the photograph, and for what purpose – what is the story being told? Some examples of photo types and things to consider/prompt discussion are:

- Mugshots – police images of Civil Rights leaders. What do they show?
- Photojournalism – images taken by press photographers. Were these taken simply to document a moment, or to send a message? Might somebody who works for a publication run by white people perhaps come at things from a different angle to somebody working for a publication run by black people?
- Might there be outside influences on photojournalism – or ulterior motives? Might the police, for example, or the FBI, be trying to capture images of the Civil Rights movements for any reason?
- Official photographs – commissioned by, for example, leaders. Is the aim to make the subject look impressive? A Civil Rights leader, for example, or a president.
- Family or community photographs – are these images of people that may have been released accidentally or discovered later? Or if they were published at the time, might they have helped a cause?