

Carnegie Museum of Art
Black Photojournalism Podcast
Episode 5: The South

Norma Adams-Wade: My dad was a veteran of the army, got a job with the postal service and every evening when he'd come home, he would sit on the couch and I mean, he would not leave the couch till he had absorbed everything in that *Dallas Morning News*. He avidly read the *Dallas Morning News*. But when I would pick it up and look at it, I didn't see anybody in that paper that looked like me. I didn't see anyone who looked like my teachers. I didn't see the neighbors who were like other parents to me. I didn't see that, but my dad avidly read that paper.

Bob Ray Sanders: I was really tuned into the Civil Rights Movement, and I saw what journalism was doing in that movement. It was changing opinions, it was changing lives, it was putting it in our face and having grown up in a segregated city under Jim Crow, I wanted to be one of those change makers if I could. So that's really what put me on the road to wanting to be a journalist.

Rosalind Withers: Of course, all eyes were mostly upon Martin Luther King. And Martin was keeping his eye on how do I protect what we're doing in terms of lives? And my father was an instrument to do that because he was able to make what was happening public. And that's why we have that famous image of them on the bus and dad being right there because Martin wanted him to be there.

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MARK WHITAKER: Welcome back to the Black Photojournalism podcast. I'm your host, Mark Whitaker.

Today, we're moving across the southern United States, from Memphis and Mississippi, where Ernest Withers played a critical role in visualizing the Civil Rights Movement, to the Dallas-Forth Worth area, where journalists Bob Ray Sanders and Norma Adams-Wade took up the mantle of photojournalists like Withers and his counterparts in their respective communities.

But let's start with that last voice you heard up at the top:

Rosalind Withers: My name is Rosalind Withers. I'm the founder of the Withers Collection Museum and Gallery. And a trustee of the Ernest Withers Family Trust.

MARK WHITAKER: She's also Ernest Withers's daughter. The Withers Collection Museum and Gallery, which she runs, is located at 333 Beale Street in downtown Memphis, where Withers had his last working studio.

Withers was a titan of mid-20th-century photography, whose intimate and at times quite daring work has become synonymous with the Civil Rights Movement itself. His work

spanned sports and entertainment, featuring everyone from Jackie Robinson and Ernie Banks to Aretha Franklin and Isaac Hayes. But like Teenie Harris in Pittsburgh and Clinton Wright in Las Vegas, Ernest Withers was focused on documenting scenes of everyday life in his own Memphis community, too. Withers died in 2007 at the age of 85, leaving behind an astounding 1.8 million images, and a legacy that speaks to the complexities of his time.

Mark Whittaker: So let's go back. How was your dad first introduced to photography? I've heard a story about Joe Louis's wife visiting... [Yes] his school.

Rosalind Withers: His school, when he was in junior high. And his sister bought a camera for her boyfriend and he didn't want it. He didn't, he was like, what is this? I don't want this. My dad said he got the nerve to go up to her and ask her if he doesn't want it, can I have it? So that's how he got his first camera.

So he took it upon himself. He wasn't on the yearbook staff or anything. He went up to the stage and captured this photograph of Marva Louis, which is Joe Louis's wife. She was in that day a Halle Berry of our culture. Everybody saw that he did that and it made him the most popular guy in school.

And that was the bite, you know, that was the thing that made him so popular. And he found how important it is to be able to capture these moments in time. And he carried that importance throughout his career.

Mark Whittaker: So he then served in the military [mm-hmm]. But there was a photography division of the army?

Rosalind Withers: There was a lab.

Mark Whittaker: So tell us how he arranged to get transferred.

Rosalind Withers: He was a Jeep driver of the, I think it was the commander, and he overheard a conversation of that lab position being open, and he got the nerve and the courage to ask him if he could fill the post. Being an African American, that wasn't really something that he could really qualify for, or it was something that was open for them to get. And he awarded him the position and that's where he really learned the skill of photography on the back end, the development, the chemicals.

Mark Whittaker: And he would take photographs of the troops so they could be sending them to their wives and girlfriends and folks back home.

Rosalind Withers: Yes. Dad said, his commander came up to him and says, "Withers, what are you selling? What are you doing? This line is all the way around the building." And he was saying, "I'm just taking pictures of the guys on the beach, and they're sending them home." He says, "Oh, okay. I thought you were selling, uh, what they call it, moonshine or something in there." So yes, that's exactly what he did.

And he perfected that, which led to him when he returned home, he and his brother from the military got a GI bill and opened their first studio and he knew exactly what to buy. He knew exactly what to get because all of the things that he learned when he was in the army.

Mark Whittaker: And they had a slogan for the business, right? That was on the door.

Rosalind Withers: Yes. "Pictures Tell the Story." That was dad's slogan. And he lived by that because he felt that the photographs were doing exactly that, telling the story.

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Mark Whittaker: At some point after he returned from the Army, he also served as a policeman.

Rosalind Withers: Yes he did.

Mark Whittaker: Was that before he opened the studio or had he opened the studio and he was doing both things for a while?

Rosalind Withers: He had opened the studio, but he had pressure from his father. 'Cause my grandfather was a postman. Back in that day, that was really a very prominent job from an African American standpoint—you were making good money. So he insisted upon him getting a real job.

There was a call out for police officers to police the African American communities because there was so much abuse when any of the white police would go into those communities. My grandfather was a part of the community that was voicing that concern. So he made sure that my father was one of the ones that applied. So he was one of the original nine Black police that were appointed in Memphis.

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Rosalind Withers: Memphis is still, even to this day, a challenging cultural city. Memphis actually sees itself as Black or white. Right? So back then it was even more pronounced in being Black and white. And I really think the kind of photographer that he became, being able to capture those moments, were even more influenced by him being one of the first Black policemen.

And it taught him some skills of being able to maneuver himself and be in front of different situations that got him a front row seat. One particular image that comes to mind is the courtroom scene.

MARK WHITAKER: This is a photograph Ernest Withers took in March 1960 in a Memphis courtroom, not from the gallery or a designated area for press, but from atop the bench itself, almost from the vantage point of the judge.

Rosalind Withers: These students went before the courts to get rights to be able to eat at the lunch counters and to do a lot of things that were prohibited at that time. That court scene had some very powerful, powerful Black attorneys, most of them, actually, became judges in Memphis. And in that photograph, you could see that it was a dividing line that was so thick and visible in that image. On one side, you could see the hatred...

MARK WHITAKER: Meaning on the side of the white cops, who exude tension and anger as they stare down the judge...

...on the other side, you could see the force of wanting justice on the faces of everyone.

MARK WHITAKER: ...and these are the Black lawyers, among whom there's a visible sense of bated breath.

Rosalind Withers: And it was right in front of the judge. That meant that Dad had to have the trust of the judge to allow him to be right there and to capture that moment. What judge let you do that in their courtroom, right?

So it just kind of shows you how he had that relationship in which he was able to really galvanize the opportunity with that judge to be able to do that. And he did that with everybody because he knew how to do that.

Mark Whittaker: So, he had had two experiences first in the Army. [Mm-hmm] And then in the police of actually being in a position of authority. [Exactly] Which changes, I mean, you know, in that era in particular, you know, that was common for white men at least, to have those experiences. But not all Black men did. You know, once you're in a position of authority like that, it changes your sense of how you can operate in the world.

Rosalind Withers: Exactly. I think it was one of his greatest skills that made his photography so embracing and sometimes even shocking because he was so up close to the events themselves.

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MARK WHITAKER: In the summer of 1955, a white mob in Mississippi hunted down and brutally murdered a 14-year-old African American boy from Chicago named Emmett Till, who was staying with his great uncle, Mose Wright. They alleged that he'd made flirtatious comments to a white female storeclerk—accusations that she herself later amended.

Like many journalists of the era, Ernest Withers traveled to Tallahatchie County to cover the trial of Till's murderers—both of whom were famously acquitted by an all-white jury. Withers made history in his coverage of that trial. But as Rosalind notes, this wasn't without its extraordinary risks.

Mark Whittaker: So, I wanna go to the Emmett Till trial, this is 1955. It's already a national story, partly because of photography: Emmett Till's mother insisting that his casket be open, and then the photographs that appeared in *Jet* and elsewhere, that just conveyed the horror of what had happened. But then talk about how your dad came to be a photographer inside the courtroom during the trial, and particularly the one photo that he took, what it captured, and why it was so important.

Rosalind Withers: It showed the moment that Mose Wright, they asked him a question, who did they see take Emmett out of his bed. And he stood up and he pointed to those two that were on trial, and that is the first time that an African American person was able to point and live, accusing someone white of an injustice.

Mark Whittaker: And the photograph. I mean, it's amazing. And you can tell that there was just a moment to get that photograph and it was over.

Rosalind Withers: You could see that he sneaked to do it. He had done that because the threats that the judge gave that there would be no picture taken in here. And he specifically called out the African American photographers and said that, you do not snap pictures in my courtroom. And Ernest Withers did.

Now his wisdom led him to get rid of it, but get it into the right hands. And he got it into the wire service. And that's how Getty ended up with it.

Mark Whittaker: He very consciously wanted the world to see it, but also he didn't want his name attached [Exactly], because that could have been a death sentence for him.

Rosalind Withers: It was a death sentence, had his name been attached. And we just got credit for him being named as the author of that photograph, and we got that from Getty. It happened, maybe I would say right before COVID.

The original ownership of it is still through Getty, 'cause he sold the negative. But it's an honor for him to have been recognized because his life was on the line, to have even taken that photograph

But he was able to fulfill the wishes of Mamie. She wanted the world to know what had happened to her son. And that photograph that had been released to the wire service made, even in Europe across the globe, aware what had happened to Emmett Till. It wasn't just a local thing in Mississippi or just Chicago, which is where he was from. This story went globally. And Martin wanted to know, how did that happen? Some of this I got actually from Ambassador Young, you know, who did that? And he was like, "You know that photographer that's in Memphis?"

And he said, let's reach out to him. And they did. And they asked dad to meet them in Montgomery because they wanted the same thing that happened in the Montgomery bus boycott. And that's why we have that famous image of them on the bus and dad being right there because Martin wanted him to be there.

MARK WHITAKER: The famous image Rosalind is alluding to here is a photograph Ernest Withers took of the first desegregated bus ride in Montgomery, Alabama, in December 1956. Martin Luther King, Jr., and fellow activist Ralph Abernathy are seated in the first of six rows of seats, both wearing suits and ties. White women fill the rows behind them and a white man stands in the very back, straphanging.

Another white man is visible in the front left corner of the frame. He's seated perpendicularly to King and Abernathy. And it looks like Withers shot the photo from practically in the man's lap.

So, as was the case with the courtroom image we discussed earlier, the vantage point here is key. Because when you think about it, it's actually Withers himself who's at the very front of the bus, looking back toward these two giants of the Civil Rights Movement in order to get the shot.

Mark Whittaker: A lot has been written about the role that media coverage played in the movement, that without photography, without people covering it, showing it to the world, the Civil Rights Movement would not have had the impact that it had, that Dr. King and people around him were very aware of that. Your father was really at ground zero of that connection. He was sort of the original person who was brought in consciously by the movement to document history through photography, so it sort of all began with him.

Rosalind Withers: I say this with confidence: Yes.

Mark Whittaker: So he's on the front lines documenting. All of these historic stories: Emmett Till, Montgomery Bus Boycott, The Little Rock Nine.

Rosalind Withers: March Against Fear.

Mark Whittaker: Right, and "I Am a Man," one of your father's most famous photographs.

Rosalind Withers: Yes, it is. That is the strike that brought Martin Luther King to Memphis. The Sanitation Strike, and as a result of him coming to Memphis for the sanitation workers, his life ended there. Two sanitation workers who were crushed in the back of a sanitation truck because they had ran to the truck for shelter. It was a stormy, stormy day and outta nowhere the button was pushed and they were crushed.

The hardship came when Memphis Sanitation did nothing in support of these families. When these men lost their lives, they received nothing. Zero. That outraged all of the sanitation workers. But the demands were just humane demands. They wanted a ten-cent raise. They wanted to be able to have shelter when it rained. And they also wanted to be able to shower, because when they left their jobs, they had to take public transportation and the public

transportations wouldn't let them on there because of the stench of their jobs on their bodies. They were just saying, we're not asking for a lot. All we are asking is to be treated like a man.

And that brought about them creating the sign, I Am a Man. Now my father is credited for getting the sticks that were made because they had had so much confrontation with the city about rioting, even though riots had never taken place. But on March 28th, they said the first window that was broken was from the sticks of the signs that they had made. And from that day before and the day after, they could never, ever have any sticks associated with any of the signs. So that's when they began to make the signs with strings front and back.

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MARK WHITAKER: That was March 28, 1968, the day that Ernest Withers took his famous “I AM A MAN” photographs of dozens of Black men in the streets, many wearing suits, holding these all-caps statements: I AM-underlined A MAN.

Dr. King joined strikers in the streets of downtown Memphis that day. The march began peacefully, but clashes and violence did ensue, sparking a brutal police response that resulted in the killing of a 16-year-old Black boy named Larry Payne.

Dr. King left Memphis, but returned just a few days later, on April 3, when he gave his famous “I’ve been to the mountaintop” speech in support of the strikers and nonviolent resistance, offering a transhistorical view of the movement itself.

He was assassinated the very next day.

Mark Whittaker: I wanna talk about Dr. King's assassination. It took place in Memphis at the Lorraine Hotel. Your father was not there. But the most famous photograph, which was all of King's aids, Andy Young, Jesse Jackson pointing in the direction of where the bullet came from on the balcony, was taken by another photographer. But it was developed by your father, right?

Rosalind Withers: Yes it was. Louw was the photographer.

MARK WHITAKER: As in *Joseph Louw*, a South African photographer who'd been traveling with Dr. King.

Rosalind Withers: And my father had just left the courtroom once again, 'cause he took Ambassador Young, Abernathy and all of them to the court so that they could get the approval to have a march. Because there was a sanction that stopped any marching in Memphis, right. And they had gotten approval. So he had dropped off Ambassador Young and Abernathy at the hotel with plans that they had something to do that evening. So my father, when he dropped them off, he went to the studio. The studio was maybe, you know, maybe five, 10 minutes walking, but, you know, two, one minute drive.

When he got to the studio, he had received a phone call that Martin had been assassinated. So he didn't even get his car. He ran over to the Lorraine Hotel. And when he got there, they were

looking for him because Louw said that he needed to get the pictures he had developed and into New York and everybody told him, you need to see Mr. Withers. You need to see Mr. Withers. So they went back to the studio and dad gave him the dark room. But he said that he kept hearing the tinkling sounds of somebody didn't know what they were doing in the dark room, that he stepped in the dark room. And he said, do you know what you're doing? Because he said that he could have really exposed it because he was nervous, number one, and he just didn't have that skillset.

So my father ended up developing those images. And while he was in there developing, there were people that showed up from New York that was prepared to take whatever he brought out of that dark room and fly it on the first flight to New York, so it could be on the front page of the New York *Times*.

And they gave my father a substantial amount of money. I think it was almost \$700 for just doing that. And the first thing that you see on the front page of the New York *Times* is that image of them pointing.

Mark Whittaker: Yeah. And it never would've, it never would've seen the light of day if he hadn't been there to develop the photograph. When he finally made it, he actually got another photograph, several photographs, but one is particularly striking of Dr. King's suitcase and the suitcase all as the, as his aides were packing it up.

Rosalind Withers: One of the, I think most, heart-wrenching photographs, he has a photograph of Martin's blood on the sidewalk right outside of the room on that balcony, and you can actually see the silhouette of his body in that blood stain.

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MARK WHITAKER: By the mid- to late-sixties, the Black Power Movement arrives in Memphis. But the leading proponent of that movement in the city is *not* the Black Panthers—it's a local group called the Invaders. Despite denials, they were blamed for the violence that broke out at the Memphis Sanitation Strike shortly before Dr. King's assassination in 1968. Ernest Withers, of course, photographed them, too. At the same time, he was getting calls from special agent Bill Lawrence of the FBI.

Rosalind Withers: Well, the Invaders were very much like the Black Panthers. Those who were investigating them, like Hoover and so on, wanted them to be painted as being bad people. But these were very educated men—young, college-educated young men who wanted to make a difference in their communities. And they were heavily, heavily watched by the FBI. They had files on them very, very, very thick.

And throughout those files, they questioned my father a lot. And his report gave them exactly what I described, that these guys are just young, educated, you know, kids that want to do good in their communities, and make a difference in their communities. But that's not what they wanted the public to see them as.

Mark Whittaker: The reason I mentioned the Invaders is that, in addition to my book about Black Pittsburgh, I wrote a book about the birth of the Black Power movement in 1966, and I know how hyper-focused the FBI was specifically on the Black Power movement. You know, a lot has been written about their surveillance of Dr. King and of Malcolm X before he was assassinated. And all that is true, but the point at which the FBI really went into overdrive in surveilling and also trying to undermine and disrupt Black activists was during the Black Power movement.

Rosalind Withers: Exactly.

Mark Whittaker: And it's really during that period when the Invaders are active in the late sixties that your father's name actually shows up in FBI files. And clearly their interest in getting information from your father. You know, it might have existed before then, but I think it really became kind of a priority for the FBI during that period around that group. Is that accurate from your point of view?

Rosalind Withers: Yeah. They had targeted the Invaders for sure.

Mark Whittaker: Yeah.

Rosalind Withers: And my father had a kinship with a lot of their leadership, 'cause they viewed my father as a mentor. And out of all of them that I know, none of them felt that he did anything wrong. And when you really look at the temperature of what was happening during that period, my father handled a very difficult assignment and position that he was in very strategically. There was an interest of what his images were, and let me preference this by saying every single image that was found in the FBI files was public images. There was not one photograph that they paid for that was not already public. The difference is that they wrote him a check for his photographs.

Now, in terms of him recognizing himself as being an informant, if I woke my father up from death today and ask him, he would honestly say he didn't see himself as an FBI informant. He had people who had relationships with him within the FBI, which is Bill Lawrence, but Bill Lawrence to him represented a client that wanted to buy his photographs. And the light for me was when Ambassador Young stated that Martin knew of that relationship.

And then I had my father's agent call me and says, "You know, your father addresses that in his book." I said, "What do you mean?" Turn to page 80, 82 of *Pictures Tell the Story*.

MARK WHITAKER: *Pictures Tell the Story* being a monograph of Withers's work with accompanying essays by Withers and others. It was published in 2000, a decade before these allegations more formally came to light.

Rosalind Withers: And he said, I tried to stay out of meetings where real decisions were being made, because it would've been trouble. Because my friend Bill Lawrence, with the FBI, was always lurking over my shoulder seeking whatever information that he found that I could leak to him.

Mark Whittaker: I've spent a lot of time looking at FBI files and a lot of it was just endless memos talking about stuff that was already in the public record: photographs, news stories, and so forth. But that also there was just a bureaucratic imperative to please Hoover, J. Edgar Hoover, and give him what he was looking for. So a guy like Lawrence, who was the local FBI agent in Memphis who was in touch with your father, part of what he was just doing was making himself look good. By sort of creating an impression that he really knew what was going on.

Rosalind Withers: Exactly.

Mark Whittaker: Yeah.

MARK WHITAKER: This image of Withers as FBI informant has come to the fore lately, due to a documentary on the subject called *The Picture Taker*, which came out in 2023. It complicates his legacy, to be sure. Some see his alleged informant status as a betrayal, others an impossible situation—as Rosalind put it, a “very difficult assignment and position” handled strategically.

Withers was far from the only Black man targeted—and trapped—by the FBI in this way. But it might also be possible to think about it like this: in paying Ernest Withers for his photographs, was the FBI, in essence, funding the documentation of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements too? Something to consider...

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Mark Whittaker: Back in Memphis, your father's also become the staff photographer for Stax Records. He's in nightclubs capturing the nightlife of Beale Street.

Rosalind Withers: He had a knack for being in the right place at the right time. The fact that he was on Beale Street connected him with many, many, many music artists. His relationship and friendship with B.B. King was very long-standing. He had friendships with Isaac Hayes. These contacts would pick up the phone and if they wanted to record this moment, he would always be the first person that they would call.

And then the sports aspect is the earliest part of his work, because that's right out of him coming into the Army. It was the late forties, '48, where he covered the Negro Leagues because Memphis was very unique, even unique to the point that it hasn't been repeated, where there was a family that owned a baseball team that was African American, and not only did they own the team, they owned the stadium.

So a lot of the games were taking place right here in Memphis. It would be a whole week of games, one game after another game. So dad and my mom, he would take the pictures, they'd go home and make all the pictures and make sure they were at the stadium the next day. And they did this throughout the course of the week.

Mark Whittaker: So those games, at the Black-owned stadium were an opportunity to take photographs of the athletes and of the crowd. They are now part of sports history. But it was

also a marketing opportunity, right? Because that's where the Black folks gathered, and where he could sell other photographs and get commissions to photograph marriages and funerals and so forth.

Rosalind Withers: Absolutely. It was a true opportunity for them to get those relationships of, you know, a wedding, Mr. Withers, can you come and take this wedding picture? Or can you show up at my church? And that was the bond of him and my mother from the entrepreneur standpoint, because my mother was quite instrumental in him making the development of those photographs in our tub. My mother would dry them in the oven and then she would count and tell him how much money he needed to bring back home.

They were entrepreneurs, true entrepreneurs and that's really how he was able to accumulate such a body of work, because he has 1.8 million images. And what's significant about that is that it covered these various categories.

And the digitalization process is always a new discovery for us because these areas in which we didn't even know we had, for instance, we didn't even know that they had an African American Golf Female League in Memphis. We found that. I was like, wow. It was just, it was jaw dropping. So there's so much history there.

Mark Whittaker: I read somewhere that as you were going through 1.8 million—

Rosalind Withers: Yes.

Mark Whittaker: Negatives.

Rosalind Withers: Mm-hmm.

Mark Whittaker: It's mind boggling. That actually the largest number filling four file cabinets was labeled "Lifestyle." ["Lifestyle." You are absolutely right.] So for all of the work he was doing, photographing the Civil Rights Movement, famous musicians performing in Memphis, athletes, even more of his photographs were just of ordinary people in the community. Why was that so important to him?

Rosalind Withers: If you got to know my father personally, he became the community historian. You know, he didn't have that title, but that's what he was. And I say that because that was one of the things that annoyed me as going anywhere with my dad. It took him hours to take five steps because he would stop talk to someone and they would tell him he took that picture. Oh, yes. And he'll name everybody in the photograph and tell them what their contribution would be to our community or what they were, in terms of relationships to them. You know, that was your great aunt. Did you know that? No, I didn't know that. That was my aunt lalala... He would give them a bit of their history that they never knew through his photographs, and people came to him for that.

Mark Whittaker: So Roz, to end with, talk about why you decided to create the museum and what you want visitors to come away with in understanding your father's legacy.

Rosalind Withers: I wanted to really do something to really bring the work to the forefront because when you walk into the archive, it is so much material, it is truly overwhelming, but the focus was to digitize. Have, we've gotten far, no, not as far as we need to. We're still under 18,000. And what we've digitized, that's less than 1%.

Mark Whittaker: So there's 99% of your father's photographs that have yet to be digitized?

Rosalind Withers: Exactly. [Wow.] The only thing that matches my father's size in his body of work is usually a newspaper or some group that owns a conglomerate of other photographs nowhere in the world have we found one person that is owned or have possession of 1.8 million images.

Mark Whittaker: So as great as your father's legacy already is, we don't even know the full extent of it, because we've just scratched the surface in terms of what the world has seen.

Rosalind Withers: Exactly.

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MARK WHITAKER: Some 500 miles southwest of Memphis in Fort Worth, Texas, the local “Teenie Harris” or “Ernest Withers” was a photographer named Calvin Littlejohn. His primary gig was documenting the local Black elementary and high schools. This is where he met and influenced a young Bob Ray Sanders, who would go on to become an award-winning journalist for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and a host, producer, and station manager at the Dallas-Fort Worth local PBS station, KERA-TV news.

Here he is talking about Littlejohn, who he's written about as well.

Bob Ray Sanders: What happened was during, the forties and fifties and sixties, many cities had that one or two Black photographers who captured the community. And they did it for a long period of time. Calvin Littlejohn, he was raised in Arkansas, came to Fort Worth in 1934. And one of the first pictures he saw when he got to Fort Worth was somebody putting up a billboard, and it had this Black kid chomping down on watermelon on the billboard, and he said to himself then, I'm going to tell my people's story and it's not going to be that one. And he told that story for over 50 years.

Early on, he, I mean, he was a painter but he had also learned some techniques in photography at a photography shop in Arkansas before he came to Fort Worth. And he ended up getting a contract with the school district to teach arts and crafts or something on the high school level, but also to photograph high schools. 'Cause the school district had a photographer for the white schools. They didn't have one for the Black school or any Black school. He got that contract and of course, as it turned out I.M. Terrell would not be the only high school. There would be four other high schools, and then there were elementary schools, but he did churches.

He has over 50,000 prints. I mean, that's in his collection, which are now at, at the University of Texas, the Dolph Briscoe School of American History. But he was a phenomenal man. He took pictures of me from the time I was in the first grade to literally two weeks before he died.

MARK WHITAKER: For Calvin Littlejohn, as was the case with so many other Black photojournalists of the era, documenting the Black community in the mid-20th century also meant capturing important moments in American history. Especially those his white counterparts were not going to cover.

Bob Ray Sanders: Had it not been from him, we would not have documentation of Martin Luther King visiting Fort Worth in 1959. He was there when he arrived in Dallas, at the airport. He was there for the speech at Majestic Theater. He was there for a reception the next day. And the newspapers and the TV stations didn't cover that event. That was 1959 and Martin Luther King wasn't a story to them.

But Calvin Littlejohn, he was interested in capturing the Black American lifestyle in Fort Worth. And he did it. I mean, from the public schools to the weddings, funerals, I mean, it was all there.

Norma Adams-Wade: May I piggyback on, on that? That brought back such memories as Bob Ray was chronicling that...

MARK WHITAKER: This is another trailblazing Texas journalist, Norma Adams-Wade, a retired senior staff writer for the *Dallas Morning News* and a founder of the National Association of Black Journalists.

Norma Adams-Wade: While he was doing that in Fort Worth, in Dallas, these two gentlemen, R.C. Hickman and Marion Butts, I view them as filling two different aspects visually with their cameras. Butts chronicled just about every social wedding, high school graduation, sororities and the fraternities, he chronicled that type of visual for the African American community. Now Hickman did too, but Butts was more of a laid back, kind of a upscale type person.

But Hickman was a fast talking, could sell you the Brooklyn Bridge type person. And he gathered young boys to get on your bicycles, now sell this paper, this Black paper needs to get out to the community. And he was the photographer, but he just filled all these roles.

And I remember, 'cause I worked at the Black press with him for a period of time, and he told this just riveting story about he would get more into the community, the everyday kind of dirty part of the community, but he told the story of the Black paper had been told about an effigy hanging at some site.

Bob Ray Sanders: Mansfield, Texas.

Norma Adams-Wade: Is that where it was? [Yeah.] And he went there and oh my, he had me on the end of my chair as he told about how he drove down there. He wanted to hurry up and get that image. He got there and it was dangerous. And he finally got there and he saw the effigy hanging there. He jumped out, snapped that picture. And I think if I'm not, if my memory's

not fading, he said a group started coming. He jumped back in that car and raced away. But he got that image.

MARK WHITAKER: That image being of a mock lynching of a Black effigy, staged in 1956 to terrorize Black teenagers just trying to get to school.

Bob Ray Sanders: And that incident in Mansfield, Mansfield happened a year before Little Rock.

Norma Adams-Wade: Okay.

Bob Ray Sanders: Trying to integrate the schools.

Norma Adams-Wade: Okay.

Bob Ray Sanders: The kids in Mansfield who came to I.M. Terrell.

MARK WHITAKER: This was Bob Ray's alma mater, and one of only two Black high schools in the Fort Worth area.

Bob Ray Sanders: Mansfield is at least 30 something miles away south of Fort Worth. Those kids had to come to I.M. Terrell by getting on a Continental Trailways bus to downtown Fort Worth, and then walk the mile to I.M. Terrell.

So you can imagine? And they were basically just asking, can you provide transportation for us? They didn't wanna do that. And so when they didn't provide transportation with 'em, they decided they would go to enroll. I mean, so four kids went to enroll at Mansfield High School, and that's when, you know, the white community put up not one, but three effigies. One from the flag pole, one from a pole outside the school district. And that's the one thing I remember that image that R.C. Hickman got of that effigy hanging on a flagpole is one that still sticks in my mind today. [Yeah.] But yeah, there was a crowd that gathered and he had to speed [Yeah]. Away from Mansfield trying to get back to Dallas.

The pioneers, they had a love for what they were doing, I mean, [Correct.] They trained, some of them did it just by, hey, they had a camera, they figured out how it worked. They could take photographs. There was a Black press that they did have a way to get some of those images published. And so those weekly newspapers that came out had their images in them, which were our stories.

So they were just natural influencers, if you will. And once you got to know them, they were gonna tell you what you ought to be doing, and how you ought to prepare and how you ought to be there ready to serve these communities. Not just take from them, but serve them. And so, I mean, all of them had influences on me, and as I said, some of those images will last forever.

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MARK WHITAKER: Indeed, Black photojournalists like Calvin Littlejohn and R.C. Hickman laid the groundwork, inspiring the next generation of journalists like Bob Ray and Norma with their drive and indelible images. But for these two Texans, the mainstream media and its portrayal of the Black community played a formative role, too.

Bob Ray Sanders: I am a native of Fort Worth. My family goes back almost 160 years in Fort Worth. Needless to say that I was in some ways a student of, and a victim of our media when I was growing up. Because you see in those days, the media that supposedly covered us, which they really didn't, also came to sort of despise us in a way. But I was really tuned into the Civil Rights Movement, and I saw what journalism was doing in that movement.

It was changing opinions, it was changing lives, it was putting it in our face and having grown up in a segregated city under Jim Crow, I wanted to be one of those change makers if I could. So that's, that's really what put me on the road to wanting to be a journalist.

I ended up going to North Texas State University at the time, getting a degree in journalism. I came after the Kerner Commission in a way...

MARK WHITAKER: This was a commission established by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967 to investigate rioting in Black communities. Its findings—which were radical at the time—pointed to systemic racism and a lack of opportunity for Black Americans as chief causes.

While many of these systemic issues of course still endure, immediate outcomes included further desegregation efforts and increased federal aid for education.

Bob Ray Sanders: That's when most newspapers around the country decided they needed one, and in those days, only one. And so that's what they got. Even though at the Star Telegram when I came in 1969, I was actually the third black person to work for the paper.

So I was one of those early birds, because in those days, the story was that, hey, the only way a black person got his picture and name in the paper was if he had been accused of killing a white man or raping a white woman.

MARK WHITAKER: Here's Norma Adams-Wade again.

Norma Adams-Wade: I think I'll start with my third grade librarian, Ms. Johnson Pitts, you know how you have those cemented visions? The vision in my brain is me being in the elementary school library, which was right at the end of the block of my home in the South Dallas area, walking along the shelf as she walks over and she says, can I help you find a book? And she pointed me to two books, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Treasure Island*.

And I took them home and what drew me instantly to those books and gave me great appreciation for her picking them, for me were the images of people of color. I was just captivated. And from then on, I just almost lived in that library with Ms. Johnson Pitts.

My other thing is that my dad was a veteran of the army, got a job with the postal service, and every evening when he'd come home, he would sit on the couch and I mean, he would not leave the couch till he had absorbed everything in that *Dallas Morning News*. He avidly read the *Dallas Morning News*. But when I would pick it up and look at it, I didn't see anybody in that paper that looked like me. I didn't see anyone who looked like my teachers. I didn't see the neighbors who were like other parents to me. I didn't see that, but my dad avidly read that paper. So putting all that together, it just kind of motivated me to wanna do something with words and the power that they presented on paper.

I was a writer. And I view myself as a griot of the African tradition, the storyteller who orally captured the story of the village and the village people. I just feel like it's in my blood, that I was drawn to use words and the power that they have to make an impact on the world around me. So that's really what I can say about what compelled me. It was just in me and I had, I almost had no choice.

Bob Ray Sanders: Same thing happened to me. I mean, our experiences, I mean, we were 35 miles apart or whatever, but we were having the same experiences in those all Black high schools where there were teachers who saw you, knew you, and wanted to encourage you to do what they weren't allowed to do. I thought that, hey, if I could help tell the story, I could help change the story. And that's what Norma and I did. We told stories, we told our story.

MARK WHITAKER: Both Norma and Bob Ray went on to study journalism in college, Norma at University of Texas at Austin, and Bob Ray at the University of North Texas.

Bob Ray Sanders: On graduation day, I was downtown Fort Worth, buying cufflinks to wear to graduation. And the men's store that I went to was very near the *Star Telegram*. I decided to go in and fill out an application. Coincidentally, the *Star-Telegram* was next door. I mean, literally attached to the Hollywood Theater. The Hollywood Theater on Seventh Street was a theater I had integrated the day after LBJ signed the Civil Rights Bill.

I went downtown by myself to integrate the Hollywood Theater expecting to be arrested. I wasn't, but that image came back to me as I went in that day to apply for a job. Now, Charles Jackson, who had gotten a job six months before me at the *Star-Telegram*, told me later that he went in and applied and they said, "We don't have any Porter jobs left." And he hits his knee and says, "I don't mean Porter, I mean *RE*-porter. *Re!*" They didn't say that to me. What I found out was while I was being interviewed by the city editor and managing editor, the guy in personnel had been calling my professors at North Texas checking on me. When I got home that day, my mother said, somebody from the *Star-Telegram* called and said, can you start to work on Friday?

Norma Adams-Wade: When I graduated from UT Austin and came back to hometown Dallas, I immediately went to my hometown paper that my dad had been reading every day and applied. And I walked into the newsroom and the first person at the entrance seated at a desk was Julia Scott Reed, who became my mentor. Now, I didn't share that when I was in third grade she was Queen Bee of the Black press and she came to my elementary school and spoke at a student assembly.

And I remember sitting out there in the audience and in elementary school and she's up on the stage and I'm thinking, a Black woman, writing for a newspaper? Now, it was the Black press, but still I remember that that just struck me. And when I graduated college and walked into the *Dallas Morning News*, there she is sitting front and center. And Julia was nobody's puppet. Nobody's puppet. She was very self-assured, knew who she was and what her plan was, but she sat there and she was a symbol. And you could use the word token, but she had her own purpose, her own agenda. And so anyway, I applied, I did not get the job because like Bob Ray said, they had their one, they didn't need two, they had their one.

And then, I don't remember how much later it was, but one of the managing editors came to my home, rang my doorbell, I went to the door and there stood one of the managing editors from the *Dallas Morning News*. There had been a string of murders in the Black community in Dallas, and he remembered that I had applied for the *Morning News* and they needed someone who could have access to the Black community. The white reporters felt too threatened to go because those murders were happening very often, and they were a scary situation. So anyway, I said, okay, yeah. I went and interviewed a bunch of people, went off into the community. I didn't feel threatened and got to some good interviews. The story ran banner page one. I still have that copy. That was '74 and I was hired within the week after the story appeared, banner page one.

And that's how I got hired at the *Dallas Morning News* and ended up covering being the first African American to cover news citywide.

MARK WHITAKER: Including, of course, in Dallas's Black community: Norma wrote about many of the everyday people she'd longed to see in her father's newspaper as a child, particularly in the Black History Month series of daily profiles she initiated at the paper in 1985.

Norma Adams-Wade: People would call and say, well, are you gonna tell about so and so? Don't forget so and so, I'm so glad that you highlighted so and so, and it was just a really electric response in the community for those stories.

MARK WHITAKER: Meanwhile, early in Bob Ray's career at the *Star-Telegram* over in Fort Worth, his managing editor sent him to cover the Tarrant County Courthouse.

Bob Ray Sanders: He told me flat out, he says, this is going to be a tough assignment because it's the most racist beat at the paper. The courthouse, I mean, it's full of all elected officials. And it was so political anyway. I mean, the DA would tell stories about the sheriff. The sheriff would tell stories about the county clerk. The county clerk would tell stories about that. But there was another thing, I had a Deep Throat at the courthouse that I got a lot of my information from.

And nobody would've guessed who it was. As it turns out, and I revealed it shortly before I retired, he was the shoeshine guy in the basement. And this guy I've known most of my life, I mean, his kids went to school with me. And I was going, well wait a minute, between 7:00 and 7:30 every day, all the department heads would come to get their shoes shined, and they would talk about things as if he didn't know anything, as if he didn't hear them.

And then I come through at 9:00 and he said, while he is shining my shoes now, well, you know, they're getting ready to do this. And so and so was about to do this. That's where I got a lot of my information from. So I became a star reporter. In fact, Channel 13 before I went to work with them, did a story of me doing stories at the county courthouse and, you know, and as I said, my Deep Throat was this Mr. Mills, who was just an incredible person but hey, filled me in on a lot of things and I, as I said, never revealed it until, of course, he had already died by that time. But his family said, oh, thank you for telling this story.

MARK WHITAKER: Both Norma and Bob Ray continued to cover the Dallas-Fort Worth region in their journalistic work, Norma with a focus on human interest stories and profiles, and Bob with a focus on criminal justice.

But they also shared a desire to affect change in the industry more broadly, both locally and nationally. This led to their work with the National Association of Black Journalists—an organization, which, as we mentioned, Norma co-founded. Though Bob Ray quickly got involved with it, too.

Bob Ray Sanders: We were interested in getting more minorities in the newspaper and on television. It's amazing, and we talked about this a lot, some people who become the first or the second, get inside of these organizations and close the door. [Mm-hmm]. And we said, we're not gonna be that. We are gonna open the door. We're not gonna be the one and only, we want others in there.

And so when we would go and, and say, hey, we need somebody else on the six o'clock news or the 10 o'clock news, we need somebody else covering these beats at the morning news and the *Dallas Times Herald*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. And of course, and they would always say, but we can't find any. What we did at one point, we had a list of people from around the country, I mean probably like 50, 55 people. And every time they said, we can't find one, we said, oh, here you go. Here's a list of people that we know that can do this. And the other thing we did, and Norma, we said, we need to involve the community. We need to educate the community on how to get this done. And you remember what we called our seminars, you know...

Norma Adams-Wade: "How to Get in the News Without Committing Murder," I think.

Bob Ray Sanders: That's it, wasn't it?

Norma Adams-Wade: Yeah, that's it. "How to Get in the News Without Committing Murder."

Bob Ray Sanders: And we held those workshops and community groups, I mean, all across Dallas and Fort Worth, I mean several community groups. So we were educating them on how to write news releases, how to come up with a press contact list so they would be able to approach these media organizations with information about what they were doing. So that's one of the things I'm most proud of about what the Association did. But the other thing we did, I mean, how many scholarships did we give out?

Norma Adams-Wade: Oh my gosh, yes. Absolutely. Yes.

Bob Ray Sanders: We created an incredible scholarship program. [Yes. Yes.] When we gave out like 12 or 15 scholarships a year. [That's right.] So we were trying to change the face of journalism through all of those programs.

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MARK WHITAKER: Their medium may have been different, but Bob Ray and Norma share an ethos with all of the photojournalists we've talked about to date. Think back to Ernest Withers. Think about his iconic photographs of Dr. King and Aretha Franklin and Isaac Hayes. Yet what comprises the bulk of his archive? The people and stories of everyday life.

Bob Ray Sanders: As I tell a lot of young people today 'cause they wanna know, have you met so and so, have you met? So all the famous people. I said, yeah, I've met many of these people you're talking about. But the people that I love to talk about the most are not the famous people, but they're the people that you wouldn't hear of unless I had told their story or somebody else had told their story. [Yes, yes]. And they're doing great things. And so that's what I want to see still happen.

I had decided a long time ago, I will never achieve enough to die satisfied with where we are. And that's why I tell young people I won't be able to finish telling the story. [Mm.] It's gonna be up to you to tell it.

Norma Adams-Wade: Every chance I get, I try to repeat that African proverb because, Bob Ray, you know what I'm talking about. It has such meaning: until the lion tells his own story, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. I want young people to hear that. I want 'em to hear that. And I want 'em to know about that Sankofa bird out of African history that had to look back in order to see where they were going. We learned from the past, and don't flush it down the toilet. I didn't go through all of this stuff to die and let it be buried with me. I wanna pass it on to the next generation. I wanna bore a hole in their head and pour some of that, that I went through, just pour it into their head so they can take it and, and move forward with it.

I always remember this saying by, Adlai Stevenson was his name. He was a big leader in the United Nations, and he gave a graduation speech one year. And he talked to the graduates about how they were gonna go out into the world. But he told them, he said, as you go, don't forget why you came. And I try not to forget why I came into this career. I came 'cause I was looking at my dad sitting on the couch seeing that newspaper. I didn't see anybody in there that looked like the man down the street, or my favorite neighbor, or my favorite teacher or my pastor and Sunday school teacher. I didn't see them. So I wanted their stories to be told. I knew their stories were worthy and who was gonna tell it if I didn't? So I took that upon myself. So I want that Adlai Stevenson message, as you leave and go out in the world, don't forget why you came.

Bob Ray Sanders: And, and Norma, I'm remembering seeing you, I know at least twice singing that song, "I Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round."

Norma Adams-Wade: Oh, yeah. I'm not gonna sing it today, but yeah. Okay.

Bob Ray Sanders: You ought to.

Norma Adams-Wade: That's my anthem. That's my anthem.

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Norma Adams-Wade: Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round, turn me round, turn me around.
Keep on marching, keep on walking, marching toward freedom land.

That's my anthem. That's what has driven me.

Bob Ray Sanders: Amen. Thank you. I'm glad I punched you on that one.

MARK WHITAKER: Thank you to Rosalind Withers, Bob Ray Sanders, and the rousingly multitalented Norma Adams-Wade.

The Black Photojournalism podcast is a production of Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. For more information, visit carnegieart.org.

See you next time in Chicago.

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