G. DWOYID OLMSTEAD PHOTONEGATIVES, Ca. 1941-1949
By David E. Haberstich

1 shoe box and 1 half-size document box

Biographical Note

Gilbert Dwoyid Olmstead, born in March 1914, was an African American photographer who was inspired by the work of the famous black Life magazine photojournalist Gordon Parks. Olmstead photographed in the Hill District ghetto area of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the early 1940s. He was self-taught as a photographer, but later, with the support of Roy Stryker, attended the Art Center School, originally hoping to study with Ansel Adams. He received a Rosenwald fellowship in 1946. Olmstead was inspired by Life Magazine photojournalist Gordon Parks. He photographed until the 1960s while working for the Department of Water and Power in Los Angeles. He photographed until the 1960s, while working for the Department of Water and Power in Los Angeles, California. He died August 17, 1985, following a long illness (letter from Sydney Olmsted Williams to Spencer Crew, Sept. 5, 1985, in collection control file).

Scope and Content

The collection contains one hundred seventy-eight (178) film photonegatives by G. Dwoyid Olmstead in 4 x 5 in. sheet and cut film and 2-1/4 x 2-1/4 in. (#120) rollfilm sizes; the rollfilm negatives are cut apart into either individual frames or double-image strips. Most of the photographs were taken in the early 1940s in the Hill District, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and include pictures of the black citizens of the area in scenes of everyday life, children at play, interiors and exteriors of houses, etc. Olmstead told his friends that “he felt it was important to capture on camera the living conditions of the residents there. There are also pictures of a Labor Day parade by striking members of the Westinghouse U.E.R.M.W.A. union, of the AFL/CIO) and related subjects. Marks on the original envelopes seem to indicate that some pictures in the group were taken in Los Angeles (L.A.).

Many of the negatives are stained blue, and are identified as blue on the Container List. All the negatives seem to be on safety film, with Asafety® imprints on the sheet film negatives.

The original negatives are supplemented with a set of non-vintage enlargements and contact prints, made primarily by the Smithsonian Office of Printing and Photographic Services.

Provenance and Restrictions

Spencer Crew, curator of the NMAH exhibition “From Field to Factory”, who later

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became director of the Museum (1992-2001), obtained as a gift these photographs in conjunction with the exhibition. Prints from several images are shown in the popular display. The photographs were copyrighted in 1986 by the photographer's daughter, Ms. Sydney Olmstead Williams, who donated the collection to the Archives Center. The Smithsonian institution has unrestricted access to the collection for nonprofit, educational purposes, including research connected with other museums, exhibitions, and accompanying catalogs, and educational research. Researchers wishing to reproduce images in this collection should contact the copyright owner for permission and advice regarding any fees which may be involved. Upon request, the Archives Center will provide researchers with the copyright owner's address.

Update 5/9/08, David Haberstich
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CONTAINER LIST

Box 1: Photonegatives

Hill District, Pittsburgh, Pa.: Building Interiors

1. Interior of house with open doorway. Calendar on wall open to February 1944. 4" x 5".
2-4. Kitchen with one-armed man, three views. 4" x 5".
5. Interior, children looking out window, 1944 calendar on wall. 4" x 5", blue.
6. Woman seated before fireplace. 4@ x 5".
7. Woman ironing in kitchen while children watch. 4" x 5", blue.
8. Woman washing dishes. 4" x 5", blue.
9-10. Interior: man holding child on lap. 4" x 5".
11. Interior: one-legged man drinking. 4" x 5".
12-13. House interior. #120 strip of two frames.
14. Interior, with woman in background. 4" x 5".
15. Interior: seated group of men and women. 4" x 5".
16-17. Interior with four men and a woman. 4" x 5".
18-19. Interior: little girl taking bottle from windowsill. 4" x 5", blue.
20. Interior: seated woman and child. 4" x 5".
21. Man and woman hanging wallpaper. 4" x 5".
22. Room with stove and bed. 4" x 5".
23-24. Interior, with toilet. 4" x 5".
25. Interior with woman and two children. 4" x 5".
26. Interior with children and radio. 4" x 5".
27. Interior with figures and dog. 4" x 5".
28. Room with stove. 4" x 5".
29. Interior showing doorways. 4" x 5".
30. Kitchen with woman holding child. 4" x 5".
31. Woman feeding cat. 4" x 5".
32. Four children, three sitting on bed. 4" x 5".
33. Interior with two figures. 4" x 5".
34. Interior with woman playing cards. 4" x 5".
35. Interior with woman looking out window. 4" x 5".

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36. Toilet. 4" x 5".
37. Interior with telephone and radio. 4" x 5".
38-39. Woman in kitchen, Corn Flakes on table. 4" x 5".
40. Kitchen. 4" x 5".
41. Interior with laundry. 4" x 5".
42. Interior with laughing woman. 4" x 5".
43-44. Portraits of a man. 4" x 5".
45. Five children sitting on couch. 4" x 5".
46. Four children sitting on couch. 4" x 5".
47. Uniformed soldier and woman. 4" x 5".
48. Couple at table, with cat on man's shoulder. 4" x 5".
49. Mrs. Robinson: well-dressed woman and plain background (fashion photograph?) 4" x 5".

**Hill District: Building Exteriors, Street Scenes, Outdoor Views**

50. Group standing outside rustic A Church of God in Christ® (with hand-lettered sign). 4" x 5".
51. Booth with sign, Pick Up a Service-Man. Original envelope was labeled Remember signs of the times and 1943.@ 4" x 5", blue.
52. Man with sledgehammer. Single #120 frame.
53. Dog and rubbish behind building. Single #120 frame, blue.
54. Children playing on curb in alley behind houses. Single #120 frame.
55-56. Woman hanging wash on line behind houses. #120, separate frames.
57. Three children, one with doll. #120.
58-59. Large group of children behind house. 4" x 5", blue.
60. Girl under house steps. 4" x 5", blue.
61. Makeshift structure behind house. 4" x 5", blue.
62. Rubble in back yard behind houses. 4" x 5", blue.
63-64. Woman hanging wash in back yard. 4" x 5", blue.
65-66. Wash hanging in back yard, with rubbish. 4" x 5", blue.
67-68. Woman outside men's room. 4" x 5".
69. Figure looking out over balcony. #120.
70-71. Three children looking out over balcony. #120, blue.
72. Clothesline and child running on balcony. #120, blue.
73. Children playing on balcony. #120.
74. Mr. Carry Diggs: soldier and woman watching children play checkers. 4" x 5".
75. Children and steps. 4" x 5".
76. Two men in Atkinson Brick Co. brickyard. 4" x 5", blue.
77-78. Back yard. #120, separate frames, both blue.
79. House exterior. #120.
80-81. Rubble in alley. #120, separate frames, both blue.
82. Children climbing steps. #120, blue.
83. Backyards from high vantage point. #120.

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84. Three children in back yard. #120, blue.
85-87. Rear of row houses. #120, three separate frames.
88. Back yard. #120.
89. Man and children, between buildings. #120.
90. Dog and rubbish in back yard. #120, blue.
91. Three children on balcony. #120, blue.
92. Back yard with laundry on clothesline. #120, blue.
93. Rear of row houses. #120.
94-95. Close-up portraits of young boy. 4" x 5".
96. Row house fronts. 4" x 5".
97. House exterior. 4" x 5".
98. Exterior: two figures looking out window. #120, blue.
99. Seated woman and two children before fireplace. 4" x 5".
100. Exterior, child looking out window. 4" x 5".
101. View of outhouse (privy) with open door. 4" x 5".
102. Girls playing skip-rope on sidewalk. 4" x 5".
103. Distant view of houses and hill. 4" x 5".
104. Another distant view of hill, same vantage point. 4" x 5". Blue.
105. Alley between houses with rubbish. 4" x 5".
106. House with standing lumber (under repair?) 4" x 5".
107. Damaged house with lumber. 4" x 5".
108. Three children, one holding doll, playing in rubbish. 4" x 5". Blue.
109. Woman and two children looking out door of house (from back). 4" x 5", blue.
110. Man and stairs, entitled on original envelope, "[Descending Dissenter]." 4" x 5".
111. Woman descending front steps, also entitled "Descending Dissenter." 4" x 5".
112. Alley with cars and rubbish. 4" x 5".
113. Street with rubbish. 4" x 5".
114. Large group of children. 4" x 5".
115. Large group of children, seated outdoors. 4" x 5".
116. Exterior, two-story house. 4" x 5".
117. Street scene with cars and snow. 4" x 5".
118. Street scene with rubbish. 4" x 5".
119. Boy and older girl standing in doorway. The Courting Game" (?) 4" x 5".
120. The Candy Store: two boys looking in door. 4" x 5".
121-123. Man sitting on steps. #120, blue.
124. Brick wall with three faces, looking out window. #120, blue.
125. Bedroom with figure lying in bed. 4" x 5".
126-127. Row houses. #120, strip of two frames.
128-129. Row houses, one of same scene as above, but second frame is of another house. #120, strip of two frames.
130-131. Houses and alley. #120, strip of two frames.
132-133. Row houses. #120, strip of two frames.

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134-136. Row houses. #120, three single frames.
137. Row houses, with children in alley. #120, single frame.
138-139. Three children looking over railing. #120, two single frames, blue.
140. Three children. #120 single frame.
141. Still life: vase with silver tray. 4" x 5".

Views of "Switchboard School, 6th L & F Bldg.,@ dated A1/16/45". All 4" x 5".

142-143. Four seated women holding telephones, five women standing behind them. Blue.
144. Large group of men and women seated for lunch. Blue.
145. Two women at telephone switchboard with teacher. Blue.

Silver Star Hero's Welcome. All 4" x 5".

146. Interior with doorway.
147-148. Funeral in church with open casket.
149. Group of people, two of whom shaking hands.

Jackson Temple / Penn Township / The Visiting Preacher in Action.

150. Men standing before pictorial panel, AA Revelation of the Ages. 4" x 5".
151-152. Preacher. 4" x 5".
153. View of congregation in church. 4" x 5".

Labor Day series: involving strike by UE-CIO

154. Two men at restaurant counter, one wearing picket sign in hat. 4" x 5".
155-160. Labor Day parade. 4" x 5".
161-162. Group of men and two soldiers. 4" x 5".
163-164. Large crowd scene. 4" x 5"
165. Aerial view of parade. 4" x 5".
166. Storefront headquarters, Westinghouse salary workers, Local 601, U.E.R.M.W.A. 4" x 5".

Los Angeles?

167. AL. A. Housing (Mrs. Cheetum) / Hewitt St. Location. #120, single frame, blue.
168-169. Street and alley scenes. #120, two-frame strip.
170. Row houses and telephone poles. #120, single frame.
171. Man in alley. #120, single frame, blue.
172. Woman and laundry in alley. #120, single frame.
173. Alley between row houses. #120, single frame, blue.
174. Wall and doorway. #120, single frame, blue.
175. Row houses and lumber. #120, single frame, blue.
176. Two figures in alley. #120, single frame.
177. Street scene. #120, single frame, blue.
178. Alley behind houses. #120, single frame.

**Box 2: Photoprints**

Folders 1-2. Enlargements, selected images.
Folder 3. Contact proof prints, selected images, and xerographic copies of prints.