



# “WHERE WE FIND OURSELVES”

## HISTORY STUDY GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

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### BOOK:

#### **WHERE WE FIND OURSELVES**

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF HUGH MANGUM, 1897–1922

*Edited by Margaret Sartor, Alex Harris*

*Foreword by Deborah Willis; With an introduction by Michael Lesy*

<https://uncpress.org/book/9781469648316/where-we-find-ourselves/>

### WEBSITE FOR PHOTOS AND SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS:

<https://sites.google.com/mapleseedcc.com/where-we-find-ourselves>

### OVERVIEW:

Your choir is preparing this year to perform a new composition by Michael Bussewitz-Quarm entitled, “Where We Find Ourselves.” We are inviting you to collaborate with your choir teacher by using these interdisciplinary curriculum prompts with your students. Our hope is that these studies will deepen their understanding with both Mangum’s brilliant photography and Bussewitz-Quarm’s beautiful music.

The music for this choral work was inspired by photographic portraits taken by Hugh Mangum. They were on display in an exhibit at Duke University in 2019, and are featured in the book *Where We Find Ourselves*, edited by Margaret Sartor and Alex Harris. Mangum captured images of everyday people living in the Jim Crow south at the turn of the 19-20th centuries. His life and work subvert the narrative of race relations following the civil war; he was able to capture his subjects in a way that was

authentic, soulful and timeless. Studying his portraits, we enter into the mystery of what it is to be human, regardless of our race, sex, nationality, or the era in which we are alive.

*“Mangum’s work exists now as a fissure in time.  
Sight and sound rise up from the opening.  
Draw close. Do you hear the music?  
Where We Find Ourselves does more than inform us.  
It stirs us, amuses us, makes us smile, and gives us hope.” (p. 8)*

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#### OBJECTIVES:

- History students will view Hugh Mangum’s portraits and read the highlighted sections (provided below) of the book ***Where We Find Ourselves***.
- Teachers will share an overview of the historical context listed below.
- Teachers will use this information to facilitate a classroom discussion regarding the historical context of Hugh Mangum’s work and personal life in the Jim Crow South.
- Students will participate in an individual/group project as assigned by the teacher.
- Students in your class will attend/virtually view your choir’s performance in spring 2021.

*Following this performance, students will write an essay about their impressions of the text and music for ***Where We Find Ourselves***. Having studied Mangum’s photos and the history surrounding his lifetime, did the music/text meet or exceed their expectations? Why/why not?*

- Teachers and students can share their experiences working with this topic. Please email [tina@mapleseedcc.com](mailto:tina@mapleseedcc.com) to submit your projects, comments, and feedback.

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#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

*America was recovering from the civil war and our black community was struggling to find equality in American society during Hugh’s lifetime. Here is a brief summary of the historical context that shaped that era in Durham, North Carolina (extracted from *Where We Find Ourselves* pg. 120-126, and articles from the internet as linked below):*

**1865:**

General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox. That marked the beginning of the end of the civil war. On April 17, 1865, just 3 days after Lincoln's assassination, General Sherman took the train from Raleigh to Durham Station, then rode on horseback to meet General Johnston at a farmhouse, now known as Bennett Place, (3 miles west of Durham) to discuss the terms of a permanent truce (*an image believed to be taken by Mangum of Bennett Place is on pg. 120/slide #98*).

*90,000 bored troops encamped along the truce line while waiting for the impending end of the war. As soldiers from both sides fraternized, they helped themselves to the storehouses of cured tobacco. They filled their pipes with North Carolina's distinctively mild and pleasant-tasting bright leaf tobacco. Soon after they returned to their hometowns, mail orders for tobacco began to pour in to Durham. This led to the birth of Durham's successful tobacco industry and the growth of Durham as a thriving town. (pg. 121)*

**1866:**

"[Black Codes](#)" were passed in N.Carolina's general assembly.

**1867:**

The Reconstruction Act of 1867 required southern states to ratify the [14th Amendment](#)—which granted "equal protection" of the Constitution to former slaves—and enact universal male suffrage before they could rejoin the Union.

**1870:**

The [15th Amendment](#), adopted in 1870, guaranteed that a citizen's right to vote would not be denied "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." During this period of Radical Reconstruction (1867-1877), blacks won election to southern state governments and even to the U.S. Congress.

As indicated by the passage of the black codes, however, white southerners showed a steadfast commitment to ensuring their supremacy and the survival of plantation agriculture in the postwar years. Support for Reconstruction policies waned after the early 1870s, undermined by the violence of white supremacist organizations such as the [Ku Klux Klan](#).

**1875:**

Congress passed the [Civil Rights Act](#). Enacted on March 1, 1875, the Civil Rights Act affirmed the "equality of all men before the law" and prohibited racial discrimination in public places and facilities such as restaurants and public transportation. The law also made it a crime for

anyone to facilitate the denial of such accommodations or services on the basis of colour, race, or “previous condition of servitude.” All lawsuits arising under the Civil Rights Act were to be tried in federal courts, rather than at the state level, though the act was seldom enforced. While few observers expected the legislation to change the prevailing racial attitudes held by both Northern and Southern whites, the law aimed to protect African Americans from deprivation of the minimal rights of citizenship.

**1877:**

The last federal soldiers left the South and Reconstruction drew to a close, blacks had seen little improvement in their economic and social status, and the vigorous efforts of white supremacist forces throughout the region had undone the political gains they had made. Discrimination would continue in America with the rise of [Jim Crow laws](#), but would inspire the [Civil Rights Movement](#) to come.

**1883:**

The Supreme Court ruled (8–1) in the Civil Rights Cases that neither the Thirteenth Amendment (which banned slavery) nor the Fourteenth Amendment (which guaranteed equal protection of the laws to African Americans) was infringed by the existence of uncodified racial discrimination, which therefore could not be constitutionally prohibited. The decision nullified the Civil Rights Act and in effect robbed the two amendments of much of their meaning. (The ruling would remain in force until the court disavowed it by upholding the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), nearly 100 years after the Civil War ended).

**1896:**

[Plessy vs. Ferguson](#) case determined that “separate but equal” was constitutional; this led to racial segregation of public facilities.

**1900s:**

*A portion of Durham’s success was shared by its African American citizens. In the early 1900s, Durham earned praise from Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois as a city of black enterprise and leadership. But it wasn’t immune to the dominance and rule of white supremacists. Being identified as black in the South meant that the privileges of full social status and citizenry were withheld, enforced through the “[Black Codes](#)” and later through “[Jim Crow](#)” laws. (p. 121-122)*

*“The liberating forces of property ownership, education and employment were controlled by racial categories that were imposed to maintain lines that were sometimes otherwise blurred. Almost*

*half a million mixed-race citizens lived at the intersection of fluctuating norms related to civil rights, social mores, racial taboos, legal inheritance and white people's fears." (p 122)*

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## DISCUSSION/ESSAY TOPICS:

**Use these quotes from the book as discussion/essay prompts with your students:**

- *"Mangum's images confirm how collections of historical photographs have the power to subvert traditional historical narratives." (p.6)*

**What impressions do you have about the history of race relations, especially between 1870-1920?**

- *"Hugh Mangum didn't see African American people the way that Jim Crow saw them. Seen, understood, and experienced now, in the present, Mangum's images prove how fantastical, how imaginary - how delusional - was the world conjured into existence by the homicidal racism of white supremacy." (p. 6) "Yet, while racial categories continued to be strictly defined by laws far into the twentieth century, people's lived experiences may have been more flexible, more fluid, even during Jim Crow... An essential fact about the portraits made in Hugh Mangum's studio is that we can't know or even guess at the realities of how lives were lived in the aftermath of centuries of human slavery. We can only infer, not know for certain, how people interacted with each other in Hugh Mangum's studio or within his outdoor set-ups. Part of the mystery and loveliness of these images is precisely that boundary between what we know and what we can only imagine or hope... Historians may work to clarify the complicated history of race in this country, but only artists, like Hugh Mangum, can give us something, like these portraits, with the capacity to embrace and communicate the paradoxes within and disturbing ambiguity of this difficult and not-so-distant past." (p. 124).*

**How do you think racism, Jim Crow laws, and socio-economics helped shape America as it is today? Hugh Mangum did not pay attention to the restrictions that Jim Crow laws would've placed on his photography career, nor on the way he treated his subjects. Do you think his attitude was the norm, or not? Why? What, if anything, would be different if Hugh lived and worked today?**

- **Read these two statements from *Where We Find Ourselves*:**

1) *"In the multiple-image glass plate negatives that have survived, we see black people and white people, people of mixed race and people from a wide range of economic circumstances, all portrayed as distinct and complex individuals...And occasionally there are physical resemblances between sitters that speak to the knotty relationships in mixed families that complicated and contradicted the legal racial categories designed to separate them."* (p. 110).

2) *"From a pen-and-ink drawing Mangum made in the early 1900s, it isn't too difficult to decipher his political leanings. [He endorsed] politician William Jennings Bryan [who] advocated peace, prohibition, women's suffrage, and greater popular participation in government."* (p.111).

**Hugh's political and humanitarian beliefs were evidenced by his photographic work. What events in his life do you believe may have shaped these beliefs?**

- *"Because Hugh was white, he had greater access to social spheres outside his own. As a result, his body of work provides us with a wider-ranging record of the people of the New South than most others we have seen. And among the faces Mangum recorded, we see African Americans who are vital, poised, and wholly confident of their place in mainstream society."* (p.129)

**If Hugh had been black, do you think he would've been able to create these photographs? Why/ why not? What do his photographs of Black Americans in the early nineteenth century tell us about their social and economic status?**

- *Read pages 120-124.*

**Durham was an unusual city in the South, because while it enjoyed rapid prosperity through the tobacco industry, it also earned praise as a city of black enterprise and leadership. Discuss the significance of Durham as it relates to the end of the Civil War, its wealth, and the relative prosperity enjoyed by its black community.**

- *"One of the profound surprises of the antique portraits is their artistic freshness... These portraits seem to embody the very texture of life, pointing directly to the ways in which experience is inflected by passing history. They also present us with unsettling paradoxes: portraits of vibrant individuals who are long dead, objects of beauty that embody damage and decay. These faces...are evidence of the intensity of the human gaze; it reaches us across time. The damage seen in these*

*portraits doesn't distance us from our past but instead, in unexpected ways, helps to close the gap; their disquieting fragility aligns with what it feels like to lie in the world today." (143-144).*

**Hugh's portraits sat decaying in cardboard boxes for decades. Their relatively recent discovery was a stroke of luck. From your imagination, what other artifacts from this period of America's history may still be waiting for us to find? How might they re-shape the way we think of our history?**

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#### HISTORICAL RESEARCH PROJECT:

1. Students will choose a portrait that speaks to them. Citing historical facts, create a "story" about the person in that photograph, and create a google slideshow that uses images from the era to support your theory. (*What was their job? Were they wealthy or working class? Did they have family members, and if so, how many? What did their house look like? What did they do for fun? Be creative and use as many images/details as possible*).

#### GROUP PROJECTS:

1. Use your research projects to create a description of how your characters would have interacted in Durham during the 1890-1920 time period. Share with the class, through a slideshow, short documentary film, or presentation the way that the Jim Crow laws would have influenced their social and economic status, their neighborhoods, etc.
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#### EXPANDED STUDIES:

*History repeats itself. Our job is to learn from it and consciously, continuously, work to examine our motives and goals. The more we learn, the deeper we look, the more we embrace the mysteries and move from darkness into light.*

1. Expand your group project into a study of current events; would your "characters" from Mangum's photographs resemble people you know today? In what ways is our current American society similar/different? What would you like to see change? What lessons can we take away from Mangum's life and photography that might lead our way towards deeper change?

2. Find a way to present your study to your school community. (*Ex: Write an article for the school newspaper, write a skit for an assembly on social justice, create a short film to distribute through the school website, etc*).
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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUGH MANGUM'S LIFE:

- Hugh Mangum was born in 1877 (the last year of Reconstruction) in Durham, North Carolina.
- Mangum grew up on a street that divided the black and white neighborhoods in Durham, N.C. The African-American section of town was known as “the Hayti District.”
- An artistic youth, at 12 years old, Hugh took art classes at Methodist Female Seminary, because it was the only local school where he could take such courses. He also played piano, mandolin and accordion.
- At age 16 Hugh was invited to attend Trinity College (which is now Duke University), but chose instead to study fine arts at Salem College (in Winston-Salem).
- Salem College was founded in 1772 by the Moravian Church. They believed in educating women, and accepted a very diverse population of students, including African-Americans and Native-Americans.
- *“In order to pursue an education in the fine arts, Mangum had to push across the boundaries of what was generally considered appropriate for a man’s education, experiences that would have affected his ideas about society.” (pg. 100)*
- At age 18 Hugh began photographing his family and printing the images in his Packhouse darkroom on the family farm. He continued to use this darkroom for many years, and stored his glass plate negatives in the same barn throughout his career.
- At age 20, Hugh’s earliest dates professional photographic portraits were taken in a studio. In 1899 he purchased the Cottage Gallery in Durham and listed (for the first and only time) as a photographer with a business at 209 W Main Street. Not one to stay in one place for very long, he was moving to Winston-Salem by that June.
- As an adult, Hugh studied hypnotism, a practice which greatly influenced the burgeoning field of Psychology.



- In 1906, Hugh married Annie Carden. He took many photos of her and of the two of them together. *“What is most striking in these portraits is their visible happiness. Those photographs reflect a more intimate exchange of feeling and a deeper sense of contentment in a particular moment, a touchingly open-hearted willingness to see and be seen.”* (pg. 136)
- In 1916, daughter Julia was born
- In 1922, the whole family fell ill in the influenza epidemic. Hugh died from pneumonia following the flu when he was only 44 years old.
- Annie died 8 years later, leaving Julia an orphan at age 14.