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## Lesson 7: Photography and Identity

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### Background

The early camera's limitations -- requiring long, timed exposures -- created stiff boundaries and eliminated the possibility of capturing movement. So, what we see in early photographs is almost always contrived to appear the way it does and shows us an intentionality among photographers and sitters. People were consciously crafting their identities. Images show tightly corseted women, families with slaves, men in top hats, and sumptuous Daguerrean studio interiors. At a time of widespread immigration, markers of respectability were important. Immigrants needed to be presentable to assimilate and find jobs. That cultural emphasis bleeds into photography. Taking a photograph required expertise, as there were no conveniently portable cameras or processes for home use.

### Prompt

How did photography help to shape cultural identities for individuals, families, and communities from the 1840s to the 1860s?

### Reference Images



Image 1

*A Family Seated in Its Garden, 1848-1852, daguerreotype, Fontayne & Porter, J. Paul Getty Museum.*



Image 2

Unidentified Woman, 1847-1860, daguerreotype, James P. Ball, Library of Congress.



Image 3

Frederick Douglass, 1867, carte-de-visite, James P. Ball, Cincinnati Museum Center.

### Academic Fields

#### Social Studies:

- Primary and secondary sources are used to examine events from multiple perspectives and to present and defend a position.
- The movement of people, products and ideas resulted in new patterns of settlement and land use that influenced the political and economic development of the United States.

- Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political, and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole.

#### Technology:

- Critique specific instances of how technology has impacted access to information, communications and collaboration.

#### Fine Arts:

- Analyze how art is used to inform or influence the beliefs, values, or behaviors of a community.
- Interpret how community context, beliefs, and resources influence works of art.
- Discover how cultural differences impact personal perceptions.
- Immigration, internal migration and urbanization transformed American life.
- Identify the relationships between community or cultural values and trends in visual art.
- Understand how works of art reflect diverse communities, viewpoints, and perspectives.
- Recognize contributions of the visual arts in everyday life.
- Examine personal and social contexts related to works of art.

#### Documentary Reference Clips

Clip 1: James Presley Ball, 22:32 -30:35.

#### Discussion Questions

- Who was photographed during the first decade of photography in Greater Cincinnati, and why?
- Which groups had the ability to represent themselves for the first time?
- What types of artworks or historical figures were people looking for to best represent themselves?
- Who is Frederick Douglass? How does the way he presented himself relate to or impact African American identity, particularly as it relates to photos of African Americans? How does it relate to the dominant perception of individuals of African descent in America at the time?

#### Activities

- Find a few American paintings or prints of individuals of African descent from the 1800s. Compare those images to the photo of Douglass? What stereotypes is Douglass working against?
- Compare and contrast portraits on various social media sites. How do the images help to shape or reflect the identity of individuals and/or groups?
- Talk about how students present themselves on different social media platforms. Do the types of images you take or share change based on your audience or the type of platform?
- Take a selfie. Compare your selfie to historical images. How does the way we take images change or how does the way you present yourself change?
- What types of events do you take pictures of? How do you share those pictures?