

*Wendel White: Black Lives,
Resistance, and Agency in America*

March 6—April 7, 2024



Opening Reception: Thursday, March 21

Artist's talk: 4:30–5:30 PM

Lang Performing Arts Center Cinema

List Gallery Reception follows: 5:30–7:00 PM

List Gallery:

Selected works from *Schools for the Colored
& Small Towns, Black Lives*

McCabe Library Atrium Gallery:

Selected works from *Manifest*

List Gallery hours: Tuesday – Sunday, 12:00–5:00 PM

At left: *Marshalltown School, Mannington New Jersey, 2008*,
Pigment Inkjet print on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Swarthmore College is pleased to host concurrent exhibitions by Wendel White, a distinguished photographer who focuses on Black history, the legacy of slavery, and the importance of empowering perspectives. From March 6 through April 7, 2024, the List Gallery will feature selected photographs from the artist's foundational bodies of work, *Small Towns, Black Lives* and *Schools for the Colored*. Swarthmore's McCabe Library Atrium will feature selected works from his ongoing series, *Manifest*, which calls attention to artifacts he has photographed in historic collections throughout the United States, particularly objects related to the history of slavery, abolition, and social justice movements. On March 21, 2024, Swarthmore College will honor White as the Heilman Visiting Artist and Lecturer. The artist will deliver a lecture 4:30–5:30 PM in the Lang Performing Arts Center Cinema and a reception will immediately follow in the List Gallery, 5:30–7:00 PM. Admission is free and open to the public.

A long-time resident of Southern New Jersey, White has paid close attention to historic places, such as sites on the Underground Railroad, and ordinary communities where Black people have developed sanctuary, community, self-sufficiency. Works in his *Small Towns Black Lives* series (1989-2002) have been compared to the photographs of Dorothea Lange and others who call attention to ordinary objects, marginalized people and quotidian places. White has described the series as a form of photographic journal that highlights overlooked narratives and historic events, such as the intentional settlement of more than 1,200 Black towns and enclaves between the late 1800s and the early 20th Century. Such photographic investigations led White to develop *Schools for the Colored*, a series that portrays the sites and structures of fully segregated schools, particularly those in the Northern United States where the impact of Jim Crow racism was omnipresent but often overshadowed by Jim Crow oppression in the South. In works such as *East St. Louis, IL* (2007), White emphasizes the importance of the all-Black school by silhouetting its structure and veiling the surrounding landscape with a semi-transparent white screen. As the artist states, his use of such silhouetting calls attention to the divide between the Black world of the school and the White world that surrounds it. The veiled

background also recalls W. E. B. DuBois's statement in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Then it dawned on me, with a certain suddenness, that I was different from the others . . . but shut out from their world by a vast veil."

White's ongoing series, *Manifest*, consists of more than 200 images of artifacts that invite inquiry into the history of slavery and related social change movements. While the title recalls the cruelty of slave ship manifests that categorized human beings as cargo, the title also functions as a verb—calling us to attend to marginalized people and histories. Researching the holdings of both private and public archives, the artist selects resonant historic artifacts, such as a slave bill of sale, a drum owned by civil rights activist, or a lock of Frederick Douglass's hair. Through photographing such objects against a black velvet cloth, using available light, dramatically enlarging images, and selecting unusual points of focus, White transforms static objects into dynamic and nuanced images--pictures that can simultaneously haunt one's conscience and spark imagination and further inquiry. In Spring 2023, Swarthmore invited the artist to make new photographs in the *Manifest* series by conducting research and photographing objects in Swarthmore's Friends Historical Library. The resulting images will be on view in McCabe Atrium along with iconic photographs from the series.

White was born in Newark, New Jersey and grew up in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. He was awarded a BFA in photography from the School of Visual Arts in New York and an MFA in photography from the University of Texas at Austin. Currently a distinguished professor of Art & American Studies at Stockton University, White previously taught photography at the School of Visual Arts, NY; The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, NY; the International Center for Photography, NY; and Rochester Institute of Technology.

White's awards include the Robert Gardner Fellowship in Photography from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University; a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Photography; a Bunn Lectureship in Photography from Bradley University; three artist fellowships from the New Jersey State Council for the Arts; a photography grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; and a New Works Photography Fellowship from En Foco Inc. His work is represented in numerous distinguished collections, including the Mint Museum and Duke University in North Carolina; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; the New Jersey State Museum; The Museum of Fine Art, Houston; and the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago. Representative images and more information about the artist can be viewed at <https://wendelwhite.com/>



At right: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Manuscript
Beinecke Library, Yale University, from series *Manifest*
Pigment Inkjet print on paper. Courtesy of the artist.