

AFTER SELMA

Photography by Joshua Rashaad McFadden

Exhibition reflection essays by

Gilbert A. Holmes, J.D.

Dean and Professor of Law, La Verne College of Law

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Irene Carlson Gallery of Photography
August 29 through October 14, 2016



Man and Young Man, © 2016 Joshua Rashaad McFadden

A conversation with the photographer will take place at 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, October 11, 2016, Ballroom A, Abraham Campus Center. A reception will follow from 5:30-6:30 p.m. in the Irene Carlson Gallery of Photography, Miller Hall.

Joshua Rashaad McFadden
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Joshua Rashaad McFadden describes this work...

The road from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, wasn't without opposition. Yet through adversity, Martin Luther King Jr. led thousands from the African-American community into new and deserved territory known as the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

As seen in these photographs, today's streets mirror similar scenes from the past. Across the country, community members of all races mourn the wrongful deaths of black boys and young men and women, while still fighting for what they thought they had all along: civil rights. Their sentiments can be heard through the thunder of the crowd: "We have marched from Selma, but fifty years later, where are we now?"

-Joshua Rashaad McFadden
August 28, 2016

About Joshua Rashaad McFadden

Joshua Rashaad McFadden was born and raised in Rochester, New York, by his mother and father. He has three brothers, all with very different interests ranging from music and sports to science and the visual arts. Joshua developed as an artist as a young boy, and was constantly drawing and painting. It was at the age of seven that his mother gave him a camera. He endlessly took photos of his family, friends, and anything he observed during childhood adventures.

McFadden continued to explore the arts throughout grade school and later earned a bachelor's degree in fine art from Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina. As a student at the university, he started a student organization that promoted nonviolence and supported civil rights in Elizabeth City. This organization grew to over seven hundred members by the time McFadden graduated. It was also during his undergraduate years that he started to explore photography as an art. In 2012, he started *COLORISM*, a documentary series that investigates the issue of colorism in the African American community. *COLORISM* has been exhibited throughout the U.S. and in London. McFadden moved further south to Atlanta, Georgia, to continue to develop his photography career, and to attend Savannah College Art and Design, where he received his MFA in photography.

McFadden was inspired to combine his passion for civil and human rights with his passion for the arts. Uprisings across this country are constant because of multiple recent incidents of police brutality and the murders of African-American men and women. McFadden set out on a journey to document these protests during the 50th anniversary of the March from Selma to Montgomery and beyond. The result is his series *After Selma*. Since its release in April, 2015, *After Selma* has made a global impact. McFadden was named one of the top emerging talents in the world by *LensCulture* and received the first place International Photography Award (IPA) for *After Selma*.

McFadden authored his first book of photographs and text from his series *Come to Selfhood* (ceiba Editions, 2016). He travels the world to speak about his work and continues to inspire others.

What Does Freedom Mean to a Free Man: Empowerment!

Gilbert A. Holmes, J.D.

Dean and Professor of Law, College of Law

The Voting Rights Act was a culmination point in the struggle for Black people in the South to participate in determining the fate and future of their communities. I describe the Act as a culmination point and not a culmination because the Act's passage was a milestone on the continuing journey of empowerment, a journey that continues to today. Joshua Rashaad McFadden's picture of the seasoned and proud Black man with the caption of "What does Freedom Mean to a Free Man" captures one of the enduring aspects of the civil rights and Voting Rights movements – the journey to Empowerment.

I got to experience that journey, not in the teeming roads of the South; but in the concrete pathways of Brooklyn, New York. Before and after the 1980s, Black people in Central Brooklyn had the unfettered right to vote. They did not experience poll taxes, or literacy tests, or harassing night riders that their brothers and sisters below the Mason Dixon Line encountered on a regular basis. However the residents of Central Brooklyn, as did many in the Black communities of what Malcolm X called "Up North" did experience siphoning of their voting power by white controlled local Democratic parties. These bastions of political control sought to protect white candidates in neighborhoods that were transitioning from predominately white to predominately Black or offered up Black candidates who were more beholden to the white leadership than the Black residents of their districts. In other words, the Black residents of the predominately Black communities had the freedom to vote but did not have the empowerment that voting should and does bring.

In 1980, I had a private practice of law based in Manhattan and was a resident of Central Brooklyn. That year, I along with other attorneys and community organizers were invited by the Central Brooklyn Empowerment Coalition ensure that voting truly meant empowerment. Central Brooklyn Empowerment was seeking to support new leaders in the years following the loss of Martin Luther King, just as Mr. McFadden seeks to depict the quest for the new leader after the presidency of Barack Obama in the picture of Black residents listening to an Obama speech.

I was hired in 1980 to represent Roger Green, a young Black man who wanted to run for a seat in the New York State Assembly. The seat had been occupied for 26 years by Harvey Strelzin and covered the Fort Green section of Brooklyn, a section that at that time had gained favor among young Black professionals and became an enclave that had a Black empowerment focus. The Green-Strelzin race involved three primary elections – the first won by Green and challenged by Strelzin, the second won by Strelzin and challenged by Green and the third won by Green on the eve of the General Election. There were many nuances to the race including the rallying of new participants in the electoral and campaign process, like the foot soldiers who took on Jim Crow at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The outcome represented a clear victory for empowerment of the Black community because an independent Black political group took on and beat the regular Democratic party of the Borough. The Freedom embodied as Empowerment that the Voting Rights Act sought came to Brooklyn, N.Y.

Two years later, I represented then State Senator Major Owens in a primary donnybrook against State Senator Vander Beatty for a newly created Congressional Seat. Both candidates were Black men, but Senator Beatty was the choice of the regular Democratic Party and Senator Owens was the candidate of Central Brooklyn Empowerment. We beat back the effort by the regular party to create confusion by the Party supporting a candidate named Owen Augustin. Major Owens initially won the primary only to face a post-primary challenge by Beatty. Beatty and his cronies created the basis of the challenge by entering the Board of Elections after the primary and placing forged signatures on more than 10,000 voter registration cards. Beatty used the "forgeries" to claim that the primary was tainted and should be conducted again. Beatty was successful in the local court in front of a judge who had received his seat from the regular Democratic Party and all seemed to be lost until the case got to the highest court in New York, the Court of Appeals. The Court recognized the absurdity and disempowering nature of the claim and the lower court decision and reinstated Owen's victory. Beatty eventually went to jail for voter fraud, and Owens remained in office as a champion of Central Brooklyn for 20 years. By the way, Brooklyn was among the communities specifically mentioned in the Voting Rights Act as requiring special review of any changes in the voting laws or drawing of voting districts.

In Brooklyn, like many other jurisdictions across the United States, voting meant Empowerment, but only if protected by those vigilant and diligent enough to make the empowerment real. McFadden gives homage to many of those heroes and heroines through the photographs in this exhibit.

“Many Worlds, One America”
Laurie Rodrigues, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English
College of Arts and Sciences

The first image in McFadden’s exhibit, titled *The Road to Selma* presents an iconic vignette in the history of racism in the United States. A long shot of a road leading into the parking lot of a small church, the scene offers a hazy, half-familiar sense of historical significance. Captured at the precarious moments before either sunrise or sunset, *The Road to Selma*’s dreamlike glow produces a sensation not unlike déjà vu: I’ve seen this before; in a movie, in a book, and so on. Even if the viewer has never visited a rural, Southern church, the image has been so engrained in popular culture that this effect uncannily endures: this image is somehow familiar.

I don’t have a personal connection to this image. I cannot access a direct experience of all that it symbolizes. But that does not mean I cannot learn from *The Road to Selma*. In a way, this image reminds me of why I do the kind of academic work that I do, which is focused on race studies and various questions surrounding citizenship. For me, it has always been a matter of ontology: reading certain texts, I learned that there are ways of being and experiencing life in America to which I could never have access. When I was young, this was a mind-blowing revelation. This became the in-road to my academic life.

The Road to Selma, in particular, stands out in the collection for me because it signals an array of ideas and events that are foundational to my teaching and research. The familiarity called up by the photograph is neither nostalgic nor idyllic. The shadowy, cloud-swept scene suggests heaviness. Sacred spaces, such as the depicted church, are paradigmatic of black Americans’ persistent struggles, both geographically and politically, in America. On the other hand, one could look at *The Road to Selma* and see a crucial symbol of solidarity and strength: one might see a safe haven. McFadden’s photographs inspire one to reflect on the progress made in America since the 1960s, but also to realize that the struggle for freedom is ongoing.

Although every viewer will not be able to access a memory or a direct experience that is called up by the images, every viewer can look at these photographs and feel something evocative, almost familiar. The viewer is reminded to resist the impulse to separate history from everyday life, and to confront the familiar and the banal with thoughtful reflection.

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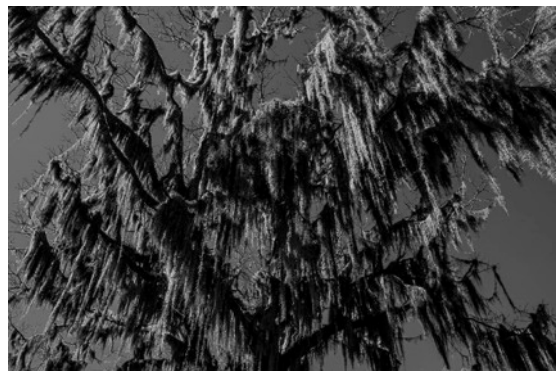
The Road to Selma, 2015



Mt. Gillard, 2015



Untitled, 2015



Southern Tree, 2015



Man and Young Man, 2015



Untitled, 2015



Forward, 2015



We do have a leader, 2015

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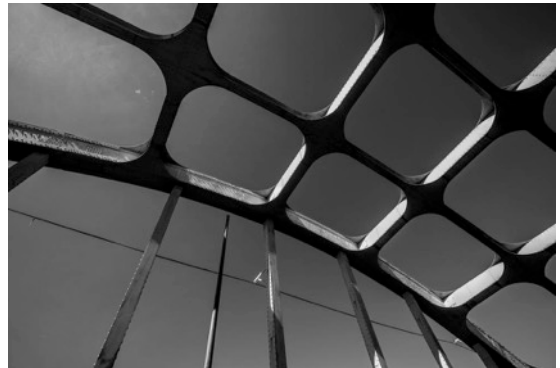
View from Edmund Pettus Bridge, 2015



What does Freedom Mean to a Free Man?, 2015



Untitled, 2015



Untitled, 2015



50 Years, 2015



Foot Soldiers, 2015



Faith, (Heaven Help Us All), 2015



Untitled, 2015

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We Shall Overcome Someday, 2015



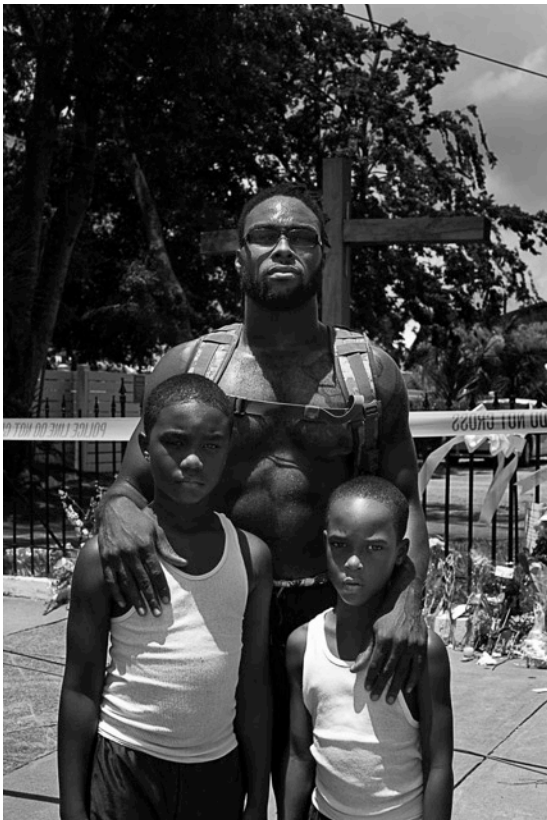
Demand Justice, 2015



#BLACKLIVESMATTER, 2015



MERCY, 2015



My Sons and I, 2015



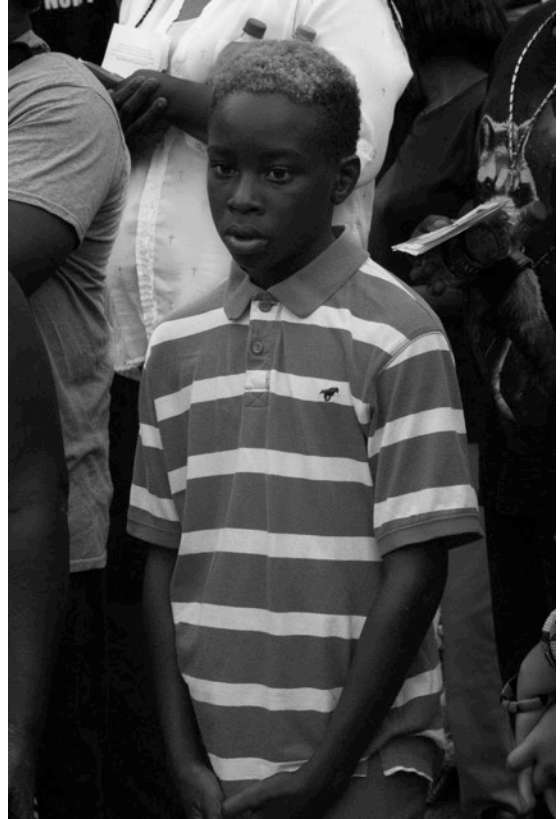
Untitled, 2015

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Little Girl Blue, 2015

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Untitled, 2015