

Apogee Photo...

The Internet's Photography Magazine™

A FREE online magazine designed to inform and entertain photographers of all ages and levels.

Take photography classes online:
[Apogee Photo Online Campus](#)

December 2009

Have you signed up for our newsletter?

I COMPOSE IT. I SHOOT IT. **LIVE IT.**



SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY
LEARN MORE



Brooks Institute
PASSION. VISION. EXCELLENCE.

Apogee Photo Contests NEW
~ WIN CASH ~
~ WIN PRIZES ~

Photography Articles

- * Current Photo Articles
- * Technical & How To Photography
- * Digital Photography
- * Nature & Wildlife Photography
- * Travel Photography
- * Business of Photography
- * Photography for Beginners & Young People
- * Photography Profiles
- * Photo Book Reviews
- * Archives: Photo Articles
- * Search Apogee Photo

Photo Education

- * Photography Workshops and Tours
- * Calendar: Photography Workshops and Tours
- * Online Photo Classes

Interactive Apogee

- * PHOTO CONTEST
- * CONTEST: Photo Archives
- * Photography Stories - from our readers
- * Camera Clubs
- * Receive our Photo Newsletter

* Advertise with Apogee Photo



Copyright © David Johnson

Octogenarian Photographer Extraordinaire: David Johnson

Come along and follow the notable life of the first African American to study photography with Ansel Adams in this photography profile by Noelle Sterne.

Weekend Photo Getaways

Andy Long makes a short weekend trip a photo opportunity--go with him to the Santa Rosa area. **NEW**



GIVE THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Apogee Photo Online Campus
Ready to get to the next level of photography?
Start the new year by learning new photo skills
& reaching new creative heights.

Limited Class Sizes - Quality Critiques
[Online Classes Start January 11th: Register Today](#)
OPEN CLASSES--START ANY TIME:
All Photoshop classes and Travel & Flash Photography

A Photographers Delight: The Sakura of Japan

Rose Witmer & Michael Lynch introduce

Central Camera Company

Create Flash with Photos

Do More with Your Photos:

Use Vistaprint to turn your family pictures into cards.
[Holiday Cards](#)

Archival Methods

Archival Storage and Presentation Products

SELL YOUR PHOTOS ONLINE:

www.photostockplus.com

Holiday Gift Corner: Books

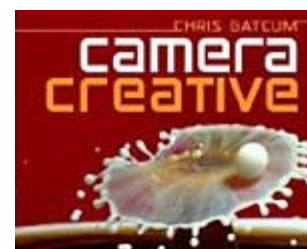


Photo Book Reviews by Elizabeth Powis

- * [Photography Links](#)
- * [Article Submissions](#)
- * [A Look at the Staff](#)
- * [About us](#)
- * [E-mail Apogee Photo](#)

[Send this page to a friend](#)

us to the arrival of Spring in Okinawa-- the stunning Sakura, the cherry blossoms, of Japan. **NEW**



■ **"Seeing the Essence" in Your Photographs**

Noella Ballenger will help guide you towards developing your own sense "of essence" when taking your photos.



■ **A Better Way to Sharpen in Photoshop - Part 2**

Learn from John Watts a second way to sharpen your images in Photoshop using the High-Pass Filter.



■ **See all articles from the last 4 months.....**

Sponsored in part by [WeSay](#)



**Keep Scrolling
Down to
Experience the
Camera**

Noella Ballenger's Natural Wonders

Online Classes & Books

MUST HAVE BOOKS:

Birds of Iceland,
Viking Horses of Iceland &
Nature by Design Workbook

Join Noella: Capture Your Vision & Express Your Creativity through an Online Class

Photography's Fun When You Know the Basics --- Kick It Up a Notch: Beyond the Basics --- Elements of Design --- Getting Intimate: The World of Close-Up Photography

www.noellaballenger.com

Barefoot Contessa Photo Adventures

Join award-winning pros for photo adventures in beautiful locations. Have lots of fun while honing your seeing, imaging, and workflow skills to make stunning photographs.

Our maximum 6:1 ratio provides lots of daily individual

Experience the Camera Place Your Ad Here Contact Sales

Bill and Linda Lane Nature's Image Photography Field Workshops

With years of conducting workshops and teaching experience, our knowledge is yours for the taking. Our goal is to make your photographic endeavors enjoyable, easy and rewarding through lots of hands on field instruction, good food and camaraderie.

We'll help you jump the hurdles over which we once stumbled.

Topics galore.

All skill levels welcomed.

Locations: VA, MD, TN, NC, WV, RI, FL

www.lanephotoworkshops.com

Camera Bags & Backpacks

Looking for a Quality Camera Bag or Backpack?

Washington Photo Safari

No More Blah Images!

**CAPTURE THAT
POSTCARD PERFECT
IMAGE**

Take a Photo Safari with Professional Photographer E. David Luria In the Nation's Capital. 3-4 Excursions Every Week

AND DON'T MISS:
"Monuments and Memorials Photo Safari"
Every Wednesday and Saturday

www.WashingtonPhotoSafari.com

WATTS DIGITAL IMAGING

"For Your High-End Digital Imaging Needs"

How can we help you?

instruction and critiques in both
the field and classroom.

**"Seek your own vision, and
make great photos!"**

For more information go to
www.BCphotoadventures.com

In Focus with Michele Burgess

Exotic destinations and grand
adventures worldwide with Michele
Burgess, professional travel and
wildlife photographer.

2010

**Egypt & Jordan
Magical Madagascar
Ultimate Kenya Safari
Intriguing Indonesia
Vietnam & Laos**

Call **714/536-6104** for brochures
or visit

www.infocustravel.com

- Camera Bags & Backpacks
- Camera Cases
- Ergonomic Backpacks
- s-size: 9pt">Lap top bags
& backpacks
- Everyday backpacks

*Our products make the difference with
their unique styles, features,
performance and prices.*

Visit us online at:

www.thebackpackplace.com

410.507.9398

- Photoshop Instruction
- Color Management
Issues
- Custom Printer Profiles
- Custom Digital Prints

www.wattsdigital.com

john@wattsdigital.com

800-443-9701

Copyright Apogee Photo, Inc., 1995-2009. All Rights Reserved
[Email Us for General Information](#)



Apogee Photo Magazine



Octogenarian Photographer Extraordinaire: David Johnson

by Noelle Sterne

[Printer Friendly Page](#)



Copyright © David Johnson

Camille Howard sing the blues, Primalon Ballroom, Fillmore District, SF, c. 1950

Johnson continues his drive to learn and create, excelling at his profession, mounting frequent shows, and sharing his expertise and wisdom with younger artists.

Fueled by his love of photography Johnson broke a racial barrier at age 19 in 1946. Living in Jacksonville, he saw an article in the local paper announcing that Ansel Adams, already a nationally renowned photographer, would head the photography department at the California School of Fine Arts. Johnson wrote to Adams, requesting permission to join the class and stating that he

At age 83, David Johnson shoots straight and strong. A professional and accomplished photographer, he is also a multiple role model. He made a boyhood passion and dream his reality: to become a photographer, the first African American to study with Ansel Adams at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Johnson is fulfilling his declared mission and has become a primary photographic chronicler of African American life.

He is a man who has risen above extreme prejudicial treatment as a child growing up in Jacksonville, Florida, and an adult in San Francisco in the 1940s and 1950s. And he is an octogenarian who sees no limits to chronological age.

Ads by Google

[Canon Learning Center](#)

Explore the VII Photo Gallery. Plus view photos and tips from the Pros.
www.Canon.com

[Be a Pro Photographer](#)

Shoot in Colorado and earn your Photo Degree. View portfolios >
www.ColoradoMtn.edu/P

[Photography Degree Online](#)

Earn Your Photography Degree Online at The Art Institutes. Learn More!
www.aionline.edu

[Sell Your Images Online](#)

Upload & Sell Images In The Veer Community. Become A Contributor!
Contributor.veer.com

was a Negro. In Adams' reply, he admitted Johnson to the school and added that his race did not matter. When Johnson enrolled, Adams welcomed him into his home, where Johnson lived during his photographic studies. Adams counseled him early, "Photograph what you know best." This wise advice led to Johnson's enduring and wide-ranging chronicling of African American life.

As the selected accompanying photographs attest, Johnson's photographs document African American culture of the last six decades, including the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the poignancy of daily life. His work also celebrates individuals in politics and culture. When employed by a local newspaper, he photographed many celebrities, including Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, A. Philip Randolph, Paul Robeson, Jackie Robinson, and the poet Langston Hughes. He also captured entertainment idols, such as Nat "King" Cole, Eartha Kitt, blues singer Ruth Brown, and jazz guitarist "T. Bone" Walker.

Equally compelling are Johnson's images of ordinary African Americans. These speak today—a young boy sitting pensively on a fence; weary civil rights marchers in Washington, DC; a father watching his daughter on a carousel. As forceful are images of a man lounging in a shop doorway, proud deacons at a storefront Baptist church, and children of two races delighted to pose together, oblivious of their different skin colors.



Copyright © David Johnson

Boy sitting on a fence,



Copyright © David Johnson

Man at Carousel

Apogee Photo..
Online Campus

**PHOTOGRAPHY
CLASSES**

Gain
New Knowledge
Skills and
Techniques

**Improve Your
Creative Talents**

Learn From
Knowledgeable
Instructors

**CLICK HERE TO
ENROLL TODAY!**

Ads by Google < >

[Ansel Adams
Photographs](#)

Largest selection
of photographs
reproductions, dvd
and posters
www.anseladams.com

[Online
Photographer
Class](#)

New York Institute
of Photography.
Free Online
School Photo
Catalog!
www.NYIP.com

[Photography
Schools](#)

Request
Information from
Photography
Schools Near
You!
www.collegebound.net

[Maui Wedding
Photographer](#)

Premier
photographer
J.A.M. captures

**Fillmore District, SF,
c. 1950**



Copyright © David Johnson

**Black and white
children,
Broad Street
Baptist Church**

When young Johnson arrived in San Francisco after World War II and a stint in the U. S. Navy's segregated Stewards Department (for "colored" people only), he moved to the Fillmore District. In this area, an African American population had relocated from the Southern states to seek work in war-related industries, and the Fillmore became their accepted neighborhood.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Fillmore District became a mecca of African American jazz, attracting such stars as Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Billie Holiday. Johnson has always loved jazz, and he started visiting them and photographing what he saw. In clubs that were long famous but have sadly vanished (such as the Blue Mirror, Jack's Tavern, and Primalon Ballroom), his photographs document the vibrancy and joy of the music and nightlife. We see Camille Howard singing the Blues (lead photo above) and a couple dancing on Saturday night.



Copyright © David Johnson

**Couple Dancing, Fillmore District, SF,
c. 1951**

The Fillmore District, currently undergoing massive urban redevelopment, is regaining its reputation as the historical jazz center of African American culture. It is now officially the Fillmore Jazz Preservation District, and Johnson's role in preserving the District's history is acknowledged in a PBS documentary about San Francisco. And at the Gene Suttle Plaza, an inscription with Johnson's name is engraved into the sidewalk alongside other important African

American figures.

Johnson is the only living photographer represented in the book *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* (Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts, Chronicle Books, 2005). His images are featured in several other books, including *San Francisco's Lost Landmarks* (James R. Smith, Word Dancer Press, 2004) and [The Moment of Seeing: Minor White \[Johnson's acclaimed mentor\] at the California School of Fine Arts](#) (Stephanie Comer, Deborah Klochko, and Jeff Gunderson, Chronicle Books, 2006).



Copyright © David Johnson

Paraplegic man on skateboard

Johnson is clear about his mission. "I always felt the drive to record my people's hopes, dreams, and struggles. As an African American experiencing racism and discrimination, I felt that I empowered the people I photographed to see themselves more positively--like the man on the skateboard. He could have never afforded a prosthetic, and he'd hit on a perfect way to get around. He must have sensed my admiration and allowed me to take his photograph."

Johnson's images capture this admiration, a deep empathy for his subjects, and a subtle symbolism. On Lincoln's stone lap, a boy looks sidelong, as if his physical presence on the icon can help fulfill the promise of equality. Another boy pulls a wagon with a smaller boy in it under a waving American flag, and one can sense the struggle up a perpetual uphill street.



Copyright © David Johnson

Boy with Lincoln statue



Copyright © David Johnson

Boy pulling wagon



Copyright © David Johnson

An elegant African American lady looks oddly unpretentious even in her finery.

Johnson's photographic career spans over 60 years, and he has broken through many racial and age barriers in other areas as well. He was the first African American to run for San Francisco County Sheriff, and he was a university personnel administrator and a civil rights activist. At age 71, he received his master's degree in social work from an Eastern university and practiced for several years with underserved populations. In his 70s also, Johnson realized another long-held ambition. He took acting classes and appeared in 35 television commercials and several first-run films. And on his recent 83rd birthday, he got married.



Copyright © David Johnson

The sweet and mischievous Clarence (Johnson's signature photograph) is apparently untouched by society's injustices.

Johnson has no intention of slowing down. "As we progress in the twenty-first century, I will continue to document the lives of African Americans." He continues working with community groups to document and preserve the Fillmore District's rich history. In late 2008, a large retrospective show of forty of his works opened at California State University, Chico. In June 2009, Johnson had an exhibit of his works at the Togonon Gallery in San Francisco, which represents him. Current projects include several shows at universities in California and others in conjunction with Black History Month in February 2010. A DVD is in production entitled "David Johnson: His Life and Work in Photography."

Reflecting on his mission and role, Johnson likens himself to a West African

“griot,” a tribal elder entrusted with transmission of the tribe’s history and wisdom. “By documenting past eras, I am giving people a glimpse of what life was like, maybe for some reawakening painful and proud memories. My work teaches through visual images. They reflect what I have experienced and continue to observe and become a legacy for present and future generations.”

David Johnson has not only broken through racial barriers but also the “calendar ceiling.” He proves that expansion of learning, enhancement of craft, and the drive to create and contribute know no age boundaries. He clearly articulates his legacy of the African American experience. But he may not have envisioned his additional legacy—as an inspiration to artists of every race, age, and genre.

~~~~~

### DAVID JOHNSON, Photographer

David Johnson has been photographing most of his life. His formidable body of work chronicles the San Francisco Fillmore District’s jazz era of the 1940s and 1950s, and his Dignity series includes images of the Civil Rights movement, NAACP voter registration drives, and children in poor neighborhoods of San Francisco and Watts. Johnson has also photographed outstanding African Americans, including Thurgood Marshall, A. Phillip Randolph, Jackie Robinson, Langston Hughes, Nat King Cole, and Eartha Kitt.

Among his many photographs, several were displayed in the California Oakland Museum’s exhibition *Half Past Autumn*, with those of the late Gordon Parks. Twenty of Johnson’s photographs are featured in WQED’s Peabody Award-winning documentary series, *Neighborhoods: The Fillmore District*. Highlights of his life and many photographs are published in the book *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* by Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts.

Now in his 80s, Johnson continues to photograph actively. A selection of his works currently appears in a well-known San Francisco gallery, with additional shows scheduled in California, Florida, and other venues. Limited editions of David Johnson’s black and white silver gelatin prints are available through Togo Gallery ([www.togogallery.com](http://www.togogallery.com)). Contact Rafael C. Musni, Associate Gallery Director ([rafael@togogallery.com](mailto:rafael@togogallery.com)).

### NOELLE STERNE, Writer

Writer, editor, and writing coach and consultant, Noelle Sterne, Ph.D., created the artist’s statement and accompanying text for all 32 photographs in a photography exhibit at the Mayo Gallery, South Beach, Miami, Florida. Ms. Sterne publishes extensively in national and international magazines, including *Children’s Book Insider*, *Pure Inspiration*, *The Write Place*, *At the Write Time*, *Writer’s Digest*, *Writers’ Journal*, and *The Writer*, with pieces scheduled for later in 2009 and beyond.

A craft article on the short story was published in the *2008 Novel and Short Story Writer’s Market*, and Ms. Sterne’s story about a middle-school boy who discovers his healing powers is part of the *Star Stepping Anthology* (Wild Child Publishing, June 2008). Her monthly column, “The Starbucks Chronicles,” on the struggles of writing and joys of latté-sipping, appeared for over a year in the *Absolute Write Newsletter*.

Based on her academic consulting practice, she is completing a psychological-spiritual handbook to help doctoral candidates finish their dissertations (finally). Other projects include a collection of essays for writers, *First You Find Your Desk: Start Writing and Keep Writing with*

*Less Agony and More Joy* and a book of writers' affirmations to help them stay at their desks.

**To find other articles on photographer profiles, just type the subject in the Search Box.**



Apogee Photo Magazine

**[To Apogee Photo Home Page](#)**

---



to the previous page.

Back to the [Apogee Photo Home Page](#)



Apogee Photo and Apogee Photo Magazine are trademarks of Apogee Photo, Inc. Copyright © 1995-2009. Apogee Photo, Inc. All Rights Reserved.