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Showcase: Blacks and Whites By **JAMES ESTRIN**

The Danish photographer **Jacob Holdt** has devoted his life to an epic photographic telling of American racism.

His Web site, American Pictures, contains thousands of photographs documenting the lives of both black and white Americans, the underclass and the privileged. He has befriended and lived with his subjects; the poorest and the wealthiest, the migrant workers and the members of the Ku Klux Klan. He has become intimately involved in his subjects' lives and photographed them in a fresh, direct style that turned out to have been years ahead of its time.

From 1971 to 1975, he hitchhiked across America, a penniless vagabond who said he sold his blood twice a week to pay for film for the inexpensive half-frame Olympus camera that his parents had given him. (The half-frame camera could shoot twice as many photographs as a full-frame camera. Therefore, both the cost and the quality were lower.)

Mr. Holdt has traveled tens of thousands of miles across this country, staying with his subjects and often eating in soup kitchens. ("United States 1970-1975" was published in 2007 by Steidl & Partners.)

This tall man with a long white beard braided in the center took this year's New York Photo Festival by storm. His lecture and presentation, curated by Paul Cottin and Jerome Sother, attracted crowds. Though Mr. Holdt has lectured on racism at universities in this country and is the author of a book that sold well in Europe, he was almost unknown to the American photographic community until now.

"I chose Holdt because of the extraordinary power and scope of the work," said William A. Ewing, one of the festival curators. "I think that our curatorial establishment has made an enormous error in not acknowledging this work. The history of American color photography needs to be rewritten now, and some of the so-called pioneers re-evaluated in the light of Holdt's accomplishment. Certain big names are suddenly in the shade."

"And I can see the public at the festival gets that, too," Mr. Ewing added.

A true eccentric, Mr. Holdt has created a body of work that is both brutally honest yet remarkably sympathetic both to the oppressors and the oppressed.

Because of space limitations in our slide player, not all of Mr. Holdt's idiosyncratic captions — more like narratives — can be reproduced in their entirety. Following is the full text for Slides 6, 7 and 10.

Slide 6: "When I lived with this 15-year-old boy and his mother in Richmond, Va., his 13-year-old brother lay in hospital, hit in a gang fight by his brother's bullet, which penetrated his head and blinded him. Nevertheless, I followed the 15-year-old on his new expeditions in the streets two days after the tragedy. Shortly after, he received a 16-year prison sentence. But today, he is out and holds a steady job, trying to raise a family."

Slide 7: "In Alabama, this poor old woman of 87 asked me to drive her to Phoenix, Ariz. She wanted to go there to die. I helped her board up the windows in her dilapidated shack

outside Tuskegee. She knew she would never return, but did not want local blacks to move into it. She sat the whole way out there with a pistol in her hand, scared stiff of my long hair and beard. She was so weak that I had to carry her whenever she had to leave the car, still clinging to her gun.”

Slide 10: “Apartheid’s Forbidden Love. I first lived with Mary in Alabama in 1975 and we have been very close friends for over 30 years. Apparently for no other reason than that she had a white boyfriend, three white men threw a firebomb into her kitchen in the dead of night and the entire house went up in flames in seconds. She managed to get her son out, but her brother perished. In 2005, I took a friend — a K.K.K. leader — with me to visit Mary.”

