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ZOOM

in on america

By the U.S. Missions of Austria and Poland

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Master of B&W Photography

In this issue: Ansel Adams

Zoom in on America

Ansel Adams posing in front of his photograph of Yosemite National Park titled "Monolith: The Face of Half Dome, 1927," in his home in Carmel Highlands, California. A lawyer says a trove of old glass negatives found in Fresno have been authenticated as the work of iconic photographer Ansel Adams and are worth at least \$200 million. The negatives were bought 10 years ago at a garage sale in Fresno for \$45. (photo AP Images)

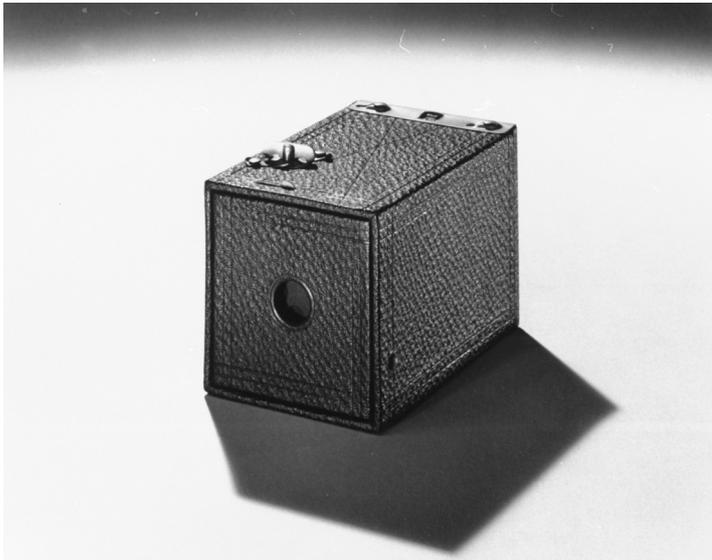
From Piano to Camera

Even though color photography existed before Ansel Adams was born in 1902, it was still a long time before color cameras came into wide use. All the better for black and white photography since Adams seems to have been born to perfect the technique of black and white photography and legitimize it as an art form, thus paving the way for color and then digital photography.

CHILDHOOD

Ansel Adams was born on February 20, 1902 in San Francisco as the only child of Olive Bray and Charles Hitchcock Adams. His ancestry could be traced to 18th century Ireland. His father and grandfather were businessmen in the lumber trade.

In 1916, when Ansel was 14, his father bought him a Kodak Brownie, a simple box camera, like the one below:



(photo AP Images)

Ansel and his parents went on vacation to the Yosemite National Park that same year and Ansel took lots of photos with his new Brownie. Yosemite made a deep impression on Adams. So deep, in fact, that he returned to the Park the next year on his own and kept going back until he finally settled there in 1937 with his wife, Virginia Best. The couple lived in the Yosemite Valley until 1962.

Adams grew up in an area of great natural beauty: the family's San Francisco home overlooked the water and the dunes of the Marin Headlands - a hilly peninsula located north of town across the Golden Gate Bridge. He was sensitive to the beauty of nature. Yosemite appealed to his imagination, as did

other wild, uninhabited areas of the western United States.

Wilderness remained his favored setting for photographs. In 1947, when he was an accomplished photographer with a household name, he said of a photographic tour to Alaska: "I felt Alaska might be close to the wilderness perfection I continuously sought." In photography he searched for dramatic light which would expose the wilderness to the utmost.

In his school years, Ansel was a restless and inattentive student. After eighth grade he quit formal school and was educated instead by a private tutor. His father, with whom he had a very close relationship, was among his tutors. Charles Adams educated his son in the spirit of the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and helped instill in his son a love of nature.

While photography was becoming more and more important to young Adams, and he started learning the secrets of the darkroom when he was still a teenager, another career seemed open to him. Adams had musical talent and his mother had hopes that he would one day become a concert pianist.

It turned out, however, that his hands were too small to allow him to become a professional pianist. While this may have been disappointing for his mother, young Adams easily slipped into his other passion.

CAREER

Around 1930, Adams published his first collection of photographs of the High Sierras and Taos in New Mexico. He met with some other photographers with whom he shared a conviction that photographs should have a sharp focus and great depth of field. They formed the group "f/64" alluding to just that - an aperture (f) setting allowing photos with a great depth of field. Adams' favorite camera was one that allowed him to utilize 8x10" large format films. It was

quite a challenge for Adams to carry all of his photographic gear, which included several heavy tripods, filters, etc. When Ansel's son Michael was old enough to help out, he started to take the boy on his photographic assignments in Yosemite and as far away as Alaska. Michael was present when his father took some of his most famous photos such as Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico or Mount McKinley in Alaska. He also saw his father work in the darkroom of their home in Carmel, California, but he did not become hooked on photography to make it his life career. He has however talked about his father's photography in numerous interviews and meetings. On the Ansel Adams Gallery website (<http://www.anseladams.com/ansel-adams-on-video-2-2/>) you can take a video tour of Ansel Adams' home and darkroom and listen to commentary from Michael Adams.

The photo below shows cameras that were loaned to Ansel Adams by Victor Hasselblad (inventor of the famous Hasselblad medium format camera) in the mid 1960s. The camera equipment that was used to make some of Adams' most famous black and white images was set for an auction with a starting bid of \$100,000.



Early in his career, Ansel Adams was not able to make a living from his photography. He had to teach and take commissions for brochures and advertisements for various industries. He also began to write articles on techniques of black and white photography and soon after published a book, *Making a Photograph*, which brought him international attention.

A large amount of his time was spent in the darkroom. Orders for his prints came from galleries and individuals. Developing was a tiresome process and

Adams sometimes spent half a day just to expose and develop a single image, which was then printed in two or three copies. The payment he got for his prints was small, usually one or two hundred dollars depending on the size of the print. With time the popularity of his photos and demand for his work started to increase. In 1976 the aging photographer announced that he would not take any new orders. Prices for his photographs immediately went up. It is estimated that there are about 13,000 prints which Adams developed with his own hands.

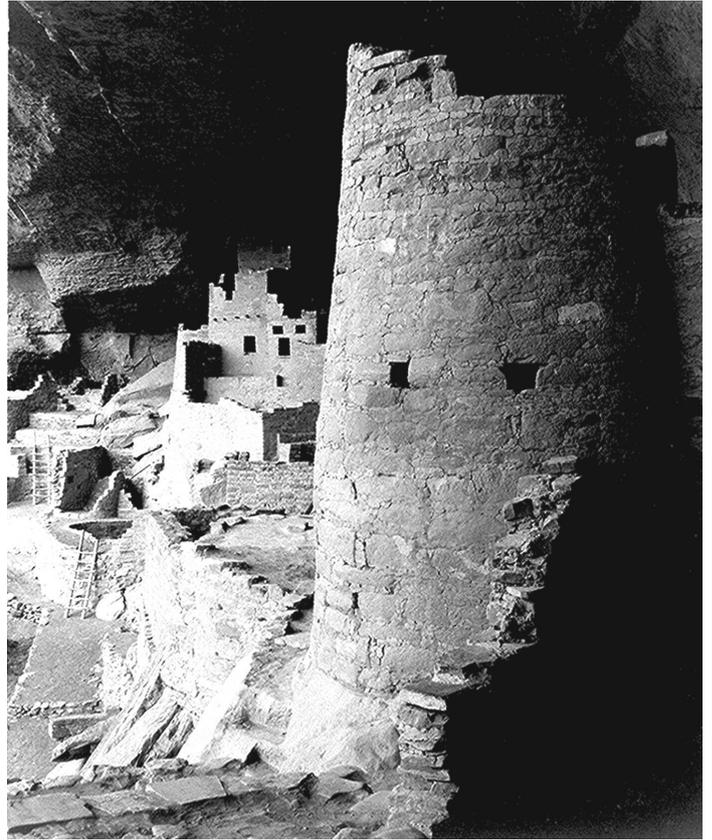
Today his works are worth a lot of money. In the photo below, an official from the College of New Rochelle shows two Ansel Adams photographs from a collection of 75 signed Ansel Adams photographs that are valued at \$2.5 million. The photographs were a gift to the school. The photo at left is "Georgia O'Keefe and Orville Cox, Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Arizona, 1937," and the one at right is "Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite National Park, California, 1960."



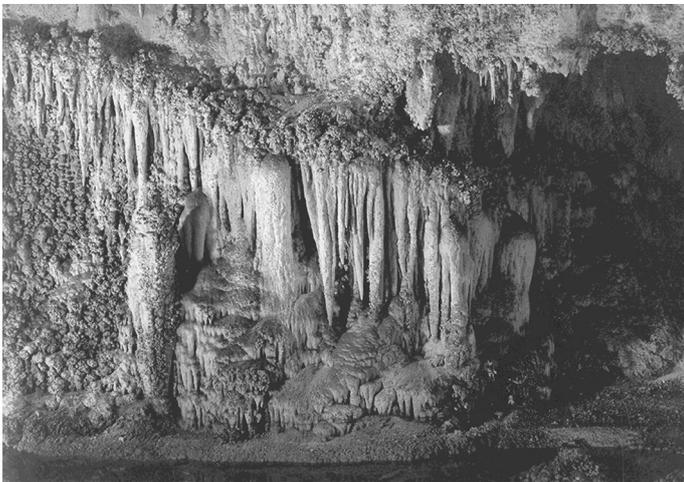
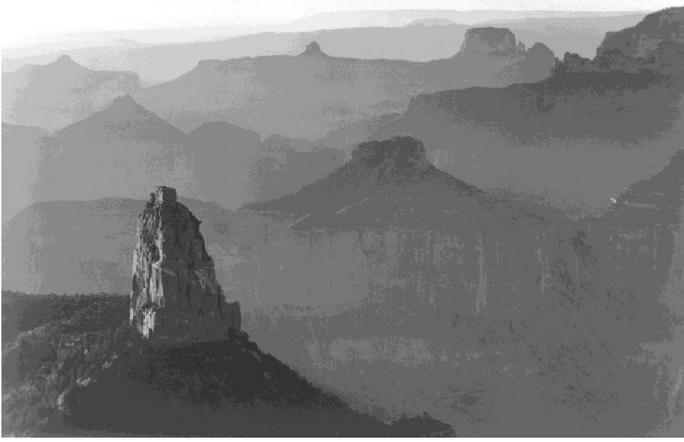
Adams' most iconic works are "Moonrise over a cemetery in Hernandez, New Mexico" and "Half Dome in the Yosemite National Park" as well as Mount McKinley in Alaska. *Time* magazine said of his work: "Nature never seemed so still or so spiritual as in his photographs." But Adams' contribution to photography went beyond the beauty of his pictures. His research on the technical aspects of developing and printing in the darkroom and his findings on exposure calculation also advanced the field of photography. It was his objective that a photographer should be able to visualize and decide how to present his subject before taking an actual photo. On page 6 you can read about Adams' system of "zones".

At the age of 82, Ansel Adams died of heart disease in 1984 in Carmel, which was his home since the mid 1960s.

Ansel Adams Photography



Ansel Adams photos (from top left clockwise:) Church, Acoma Pueblo; Untitled; Mt. Moran; Teton National Park; Acoma Pueblo



Ansel Adams photos (from top left clockwise:) Grand Canyon NP; Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico; Evening, McDonald Lake, Glacier NP; Junction Peak; In Glacier NP; Formations and Pool in Carlsbad Caverns NP; Grand Teton; Canyon de Chelle

Zone System for B&W Photographers

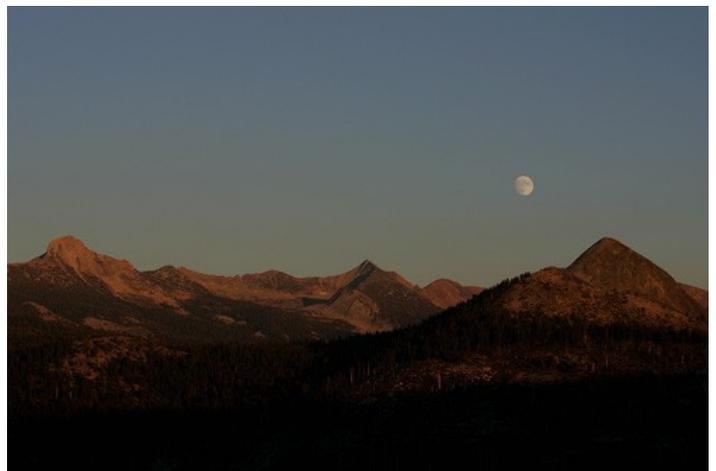
Ansel Adams called the zone system “a codification of the principles of sensitometry, worked out by Fred Archer and myself at the Art Center School in Los Angeles, around 1939-40.”

The camera measures exposure for average circumstances, i.e. it measures average reflectance of objects, which is 18% (the middle between pure black and pure white). This means that black is brightened up causing over-exposure while white is darkened causing under-exposure. A photographer who creates an image may want to achieve a different result - for example a dramatically dark silhouette of a forest or sparkingly white snow. In order to achieve his goal, the photographer has to adjust exposure accordingly.

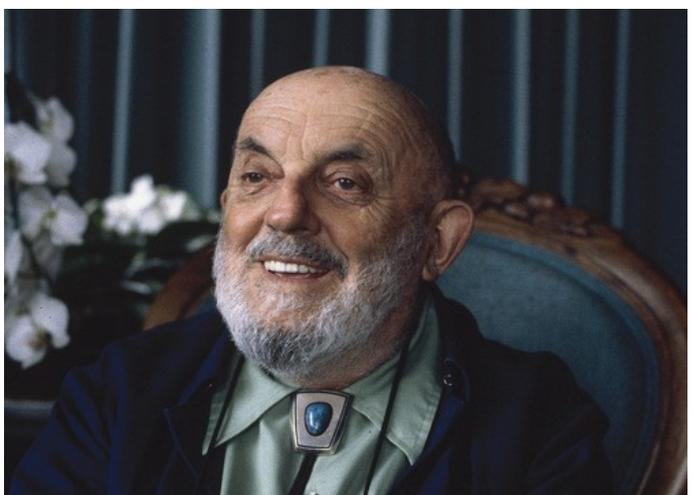
This is where the zone system comes in handy. It tells the photographer how to adjust the meter reading. The system divides a scene to 10 zones according to a tonal scale:

Zone Zero: Pure black, Zone One: Nearly black
Zone Two: Grayish black, Zone Three: Blackish gray, Zone Four: Darkish gray, Zone Five: Middle gray (the 18% reflectance), Zone Six: Light middle gray, Zone Seven Light gray, Zone Eight: Very light gray, Zone Nine: Pure white

Every zone differs from the one before it or after it by 1 stop aperture. The middle, Zone Five, is the 18% reflectance zone.



(left) Lane Wilson checks the image through his 5 x 7 view camera as he focuses on the Clark Mountain Range on September 15, 2005, seen from Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park. Astronomers pinned down the exact time and date that renowned photographer Ansel Adams snapped his ethereal picture “Autumn Moon”, and determined that the sun, moon and mountains would align in the same positions on September 15, 2005 at 7:03 p.m., as they did over 55 years earlier when Adams photographed the scene. Photographers flocked to Glacier Point in efforts to reproduce Adams’ photograph. (right) The moon rises over the Clark Mountain Range on September 15, 2005, seen from Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, California. (photos AP Images)



(left) A letter to the widow of Victor Hasselblad and a gray card used by Adams to determine camera exposure. The photo at top shows Adams using a Hasselblad. (right) Ansel Adams in 1980 (photos AP Images)

Activity Page

EXERCISE 1: SPEAKING

Work with another student. Look at the photograph on the right. This photo won the Pulitzer Prize in 1954. It was taken by an amateur photographer with a Kodak Brownie camera on the Pit River Bridge across Shasta Lake near Redding, California on May 3, 1953. The photo shows one of two drivers trapped in the cab of a tractor trailer who is pulled to safety by a rope. Both drivers were rescued.



(photo AP Images)

“It’s not the equipment that makes a good photographer.” Do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

With your partner discuss your views on good photography. What qualities should a good photo have? Do you take pictures yourself? What kind of camera do you use? What do you photograph? Do you use the automatic or manual mode? Do you like watching other people’s photos? What photos do you like watching?

EXERCISE 2: VOCABULARY STUDY

Look at the list of words on the right. They describe different parts of a camera. Do you know the words? Take your camera or use the photo below and name the parts of the camera:



1. camera body
2. lens
3. shutter release button
4. viewfinder
5. strap
6. battery compartment
7. tripod socket
8. focus assist light
9. lens protector hood

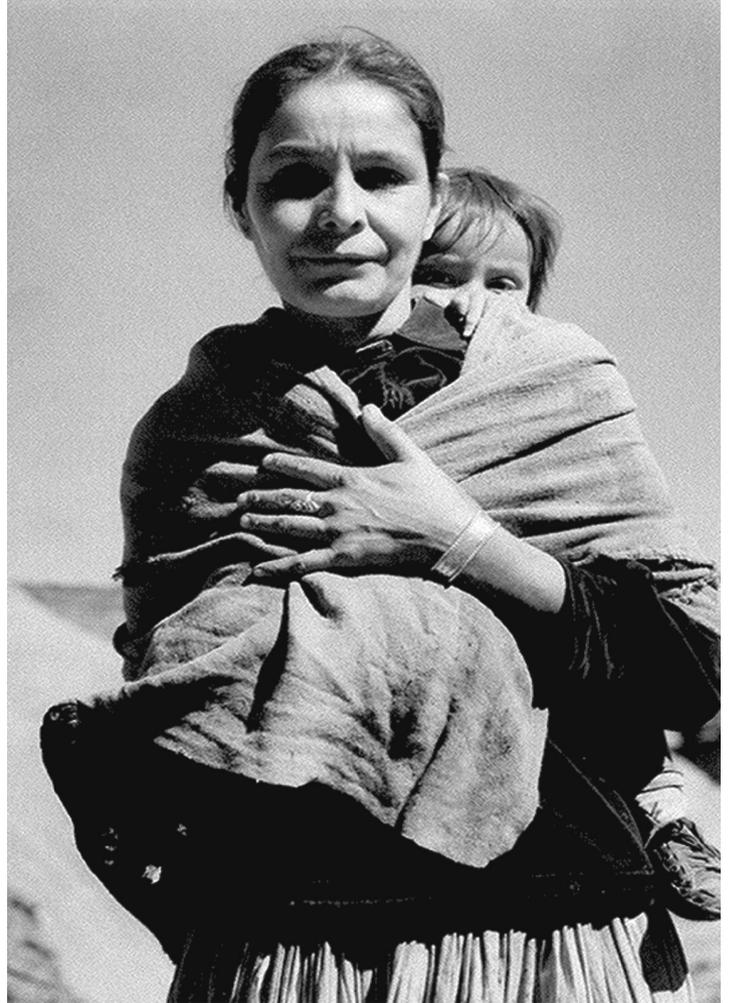
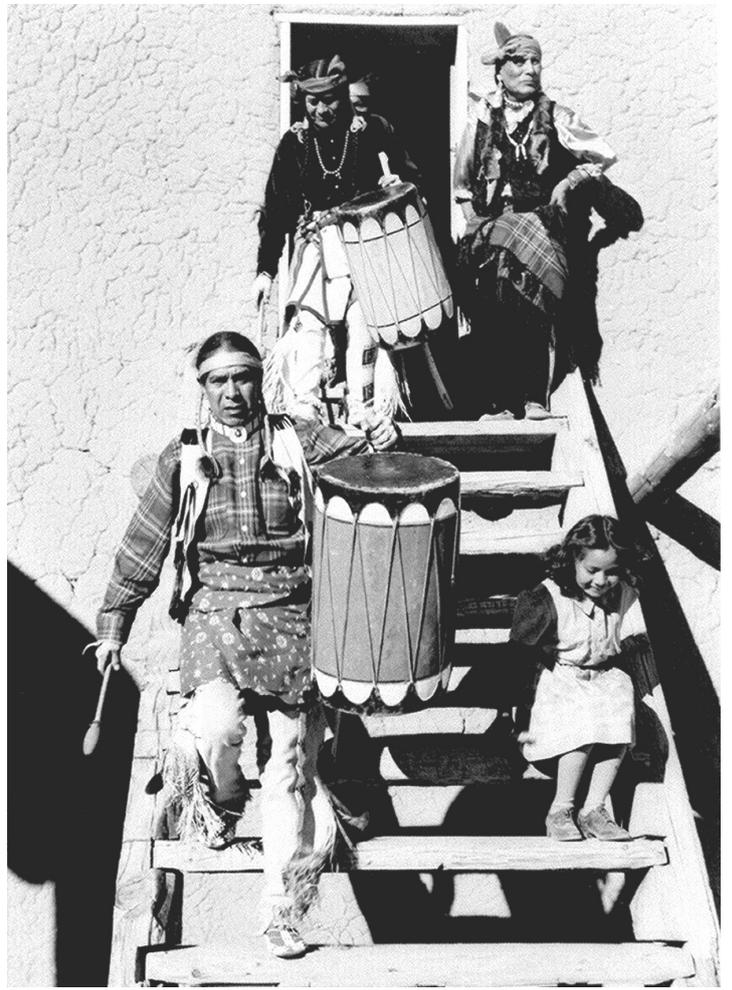
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Ansel Adams photos (from top left clockwise: Navajo Girl, Canyon de Chelle, Arizona; Dance, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico, 1942, the same title, Navajo Woman and Child, Canyon de Chelle, Arizona