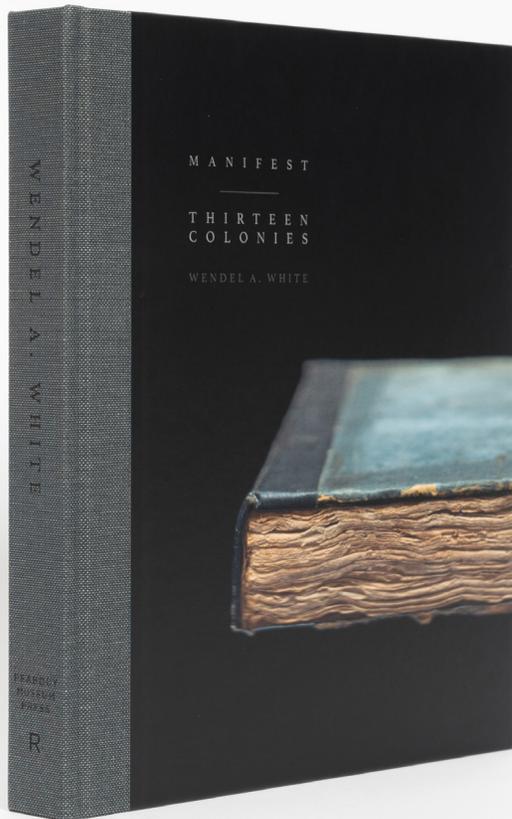




RADIUS BOOKS | Study Guide

Wendel A. White

## Manifest | Thirteen Colonies



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“I am increasingly interested in the residual power of the past to inhabit material remains... *Manifest* is an effort to seek out the artifacts and material evidence of the American construct and representation of race.”

— Wendel A. White

This study guide was created by Radius Books to accompany *Manifest | Thirteen Colonies* (2024), a monograph by Wendel A. White. To learn more about educational programs and offerings from Radius Books, please visit [radiusbooks.org](https://radiusbooks.org) or email us at [community@radiusbooks.org](mailto:community@radiusbooks.org).



## About this Study Guide

This study guide was created by Radius Books to accompany *Manifest / Thirteen Colonies*, a monograph by Wendel A. White co-published with the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University in 2024.

Conceived as a resource for educators, students, and individual readers alike, this study guide is designed to aid and inspire meaningful lesson planning, classroom discussions, and research surrounding the book, its themes, and White's artistic practice. The thirteen-page guide includes prompts for discussion, relevant excerpts of artwork and text from the monograph, and generative activities that can be adapted for classroom use or personal study.

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Wendel A. White  
Manifest | Thirteen Colonies

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### Key Terms & Connections

African American literature  
Archives  
Artifact  
Cultural history  
Material culture  
Memory  
Identity  
Photography

*Manifest | Thirteen Colonies* is a photographic project and journey through the repositories of African American material culture found in libraries, museums, and archives of the original thirteen English colonies and Washington, DC. Conceived by photographer Wendel A. White, this project is a personal reliquary of the remarkable evidence of Black agency and racial oppression stored in public collections. Accompanying his imagery, White discusses his approach to finding, selecting, and photographing artifacts—from rare singular objects to more quotidian materials—and highlights their significance as forensic evidence of Black life and history in the United States.

“I try to make work in which I’m responding to the experience of the encounter, not replicating it...in *Manifest* objects that had been obscured were coming into my field of vision, so focus became very important.”

— WENDEL A. WHITE



Illustration of Wendel A. White by T.S. Abe.

## CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

<b>Before Reading</b>	<b>Reflect:</b> What kinds of objects do you expect to find in a library, archive, or museum? Who puts them there, and why? What is an artifact?
<b>While Reading</b>	<b>Observe:</b> What is similar about each of White's photographs? What varies from image to image? What parts of the image draw your focus?
<b>After Reading</b>	<b>Respond:</b> Which objects or photographs in this collection most surprised you, and why? Articulate three questions that emerged for you as you looked at White's photographs.

## THE ARTIST AS RESEARCHER

Throughout the book, White includes extended captions about specific images. Written in the first person, these captions reveal insights into White's process as both artist and researcher. A selection of these extended captions are excerpted on pages 6–11 of this guide.

Compose your own extended caption for one of the photographs in the monograph that intrigues or challenges you. Begin by describing your initial encounter with the object/image. What do you see, think, feel, wonder as you look at the image? What additional historical information can you discover about this object or the collection it is drawn from? How does your experience of the photograph change after researching the subject matter?

## THE ARTIST AS READER

White is an avid reader and a rigorous researcher; he often listens to audiobooks when he is on the road traveling from one archive or collection to another. On page 291 of the book, White includes an excerpt from his personal library, listing texts that informed his *Manifest* project and photographic practice.

Develop your own "Further Reading" list that details the books, films, podcasts, and music that shape and influence your creative practice.



*Inkwell*, James Baldwin. Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture | WASHINGTON, DC

## For Discussion

“History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations.”

— JAMES BALDWIN  
*Ebony Magazine*, August 1965

This quote (left) serves as the epigraph to Wendel A. White’s artist statement on *Manifest: Thirteen Colonies* (see page 13.) An epigraph is a quotation placed at the beginning of a literary work or text that suggests its theme or focus.

In a group or pair, read the quote by James Baldwin out loud. Together, discuss the following:

- Why might White have chosen this quote to frame *Manifest / Thirteen Colonies*? Does this quote change your understanding of White’s project or process? If so, how?
- Consider Baldwin’s assertion that “history comes from the fact that we carry it within us.” What does this mean to you? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Do White’s photographs change your perception of what is recognized as history or historical? If so, how?
- If you wanted to document the history of your family or community, what object or artifact would you choose to save in a museum, archive, or library?

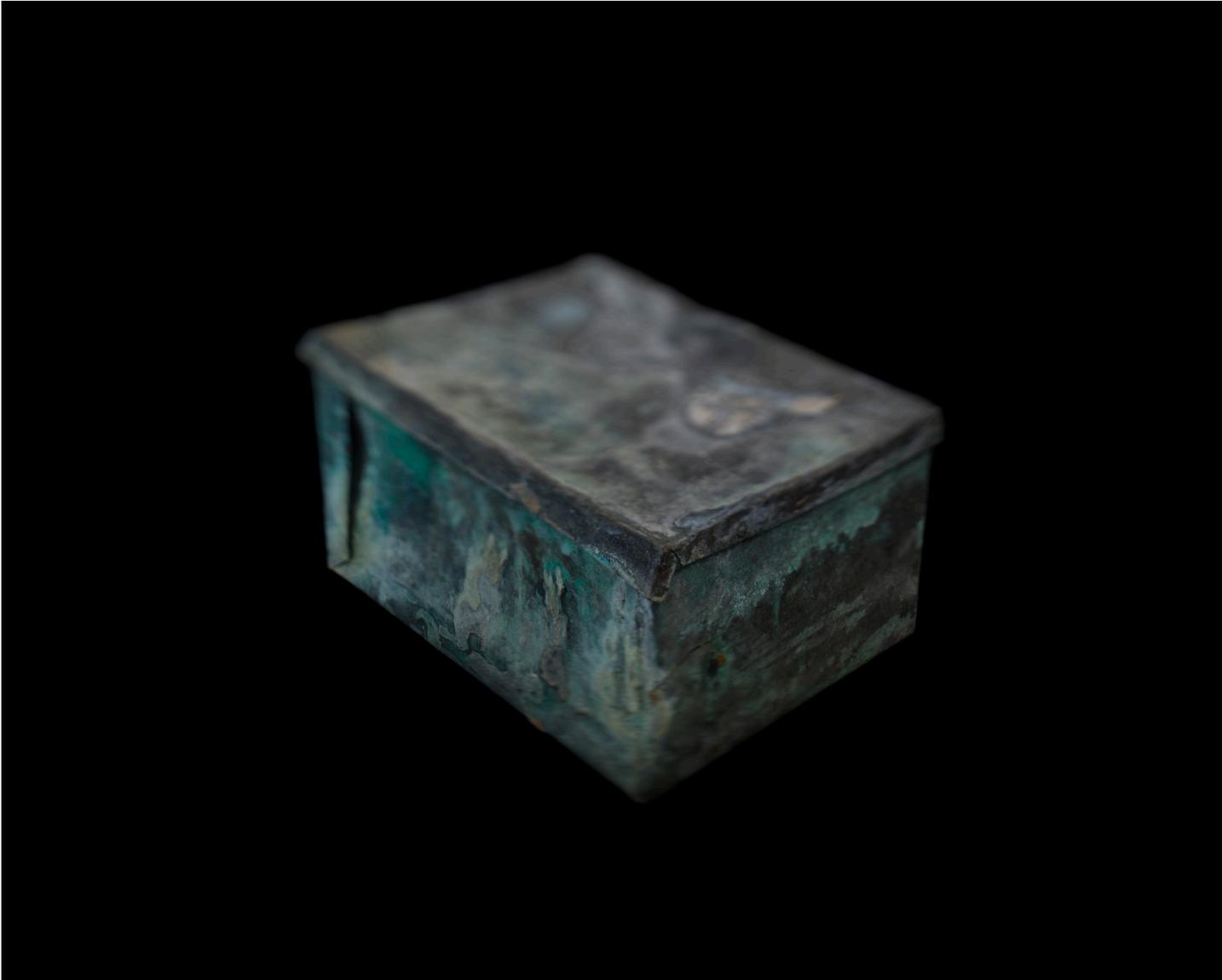
Wendel A. White: Manifest | Thirteen Colonies  
Selected Excerpts



*Hair*, Frederick Douglass. Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester | ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

This is the first image that would become part of the work encompassed by the portfolio *Manifest*, of which *Manifest: Thirteen Colonies* is an iteration. In Rochester, NY, I visited Frederick Douglass's grave site in Mt. Hope Cemetery. Following my interest in Douglass, I connected with the Special Collections at the Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester. While I had initially set out to work on a landscape project in the area, my work changed direction after I encountered this lock of Frederick Douglass's hair, made a photograph, and became completely absorbed in the ideas around African American material culture in public collections. The experience of direct contact with a remnant of Douglass's body was powerful and transformative. While the practice of saving a lock of hair as a memento was customary well into the beginning of the twentieth century, for Douglass, his hair and its appearance became an iconic symbol of his persona. As one of the most photographed figures of the nineteenth century, his beautiful and striking hair style was very much part of the image he so carefully constructed. Finding this remnant of his hair in the collection at the University of Rochester and making a photograph felt very much like an extension or continuation of his efforts to be seen and represented through the photographic image.

— WENDEL A. WHITE: MANIFEST | THIRTEEN COLONIES | PG. 29



*Cornerstone Tin Box.* Mt. Moriah Collection, Banneker Douglass Museum | ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

The absence of African American narratives from the historical record of the United States is now well documented and being addressed (and in some quarters opposed) in the index of our public archives. However, throughout that history, Black communities did not remain passive in the process of recording the history and events of significance to the community, stories that were documented through the work of early Black scholars (literature, autobiography, and “slave narratives”), civic organizations, and Black churches. The history of the African American community has been preserved through many formal and informal rituals of memory. The use of the cornerstone in building—as both a commemoration of a task accomplished and a place for holding records that memorialize the civic effort (building a church)—created an archive for which no external permission was required.

— WENDEL A. WHITE: *MANIFEST | THIRTEEN COLONIES* | PG. 40



*Autograph Album*, D. A. Burrell, 1915. Special Collections, L. Douglas Wilder Library, Virginia Union University | RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

**Extended Caption** | *Autograph Album, D. A. Burrell, 1915*

Journals, scrapbooks, diaries, albums, letters, and ephemera of various types represent another form of memorial preservation. Throughout my exploration of public archives, I have encountered these personal bookkeeping records of Black experience. The content is assembled in individual, idiosyncratic ways to create a collage of events both important and trivial. The mélange of events conveyed in these journals speak to the remarkable transformation that occurred as a result of African American efforts towards self-emancipation.

This album created during a student's time at the Hampton Institute reflects a tender ordinariness that we hope for in every life but is remarkable for a population that was fifty years from bondage and now confronted by the institutional support of segregation (*Plessy v. Ferguson* and a newly segregated federal government). Francis Benjamin Johnston's Hampton Album, published by the Museum of Modern Art in 1966, was among the first serious photography books I owned, found in a used bookstore in the early 1970s, when I was a high school student and my interest in photography was just beginning. Burrell's "Hampton album" is a stark contrast to Johnston's very formal, posed, and technically proficient images of life at Hampton Institute. Viewing the Burrell album is a deeply personal journey in the life of a particular student who set out on a path of achievement.

— WENDEL A. WHITE: *MANIFEST | THIRTEEN COLONIES* | PG. 260

## About the Artist

**Wendel A. White** 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. White 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; Rochester Institute of Technology; and is currently Distinguished Professor of Art at Stockton University.

His work has received various awards and fellowships, including an honorary Doctor of Arts (h.c.), Oakland University; Robert Gardner Fellow in Photography, Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University; John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Photography; Bunn Lectureship in Photography, Bradley University; four artist fellowships from the New Jersey State Council for the Arts (most recently in 2025); Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; and New Works Photography Fellowship from En Foco Inc.

His work is represented in museum and corporate collections, including the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; and Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL; among many others.

Artist Website: [wendelwhite.com](http://wendelwhite.com)



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