AN INTRODUCTION TO
FRAMING SHADOWS:
THE WORK AND LESSONS OF DR. KIMBERLY WALLACE-SANDERS

A STEREOTYPE IS AN OVERSIMPLIFIED GENERALIZATION ABOUT A PERSON OR A GROUP OF PEOPLE WITHOUT REGARD FOR INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES. EVEN STEREOTYPES THAT SEEM POSITIVE CAN HAVE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES.

WARM UP: Complete the following questions. Click on hyperlinks to access websites.

ACCESS THE FRAMING SHADOWS “PORTRAIT” PAGE. SCROLL THROUGH THE PAGE AND LOOK OVER THE PHOTOGRAPHS. WITHOUT ANY OUTSIDE CONTEXT, WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE SUBJECT OF THESE PHOTOGRAPHS?
NOW READ THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO
DR. KIMBLERLY WALLACE-SANDERS’ BOOK MAMMY: A CENTURY OF RACE, GENDER
AND MEMORY (PUBLISHED BY UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS, 2009), AND ANSWER
THE QUESTIONS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE.

Drawing Boundaries: Mapping Mammy

I define the standard, most recognizable mammy character as a creative combination of extreme
behavior and exaggerated features. Mammy’s body is grotesquely marked by excess: she is usually
extremely overweight, very tall, broad-shouldered; her skin is nearly black. She manages to be a jolly
presence—she often sings or tells stories while she works—and a strict disciplinarian at the same time.

First as slave, then as a free woman, the mammy is largely associated with the care of white children or
depicted with noticeable attachment to white children. Her unprecedented devotion to her white family
reflects her racial inferiority. Mammy is often both her title and the only name she has ever been given.
She may also be a cook or personal maid to her mistress—a classic southern belle—whom she infantilizes.

Her clothes are typical of a domestic: headscarf and apron, but she is especially attracted to brightly colored,
elaborately tied scarves. Mammy speaks the ungrammatical “plantation dialect” made famous in the 1890s
by popular white southern authors like Joel Chandler Harris and by subsequent minstrel shows. Her own
children are usually dirty and ill mannered, yet they serve as suitable playmates for her white charges.

She is typically depicted as impatient or brusque (sometimes even violent or abusive) with her
own children, in contrast to her lavish, affectionate patience for her white charges. Mammy wields
considerable authority within the plantation household and consequently retains a measure of dubious,
unreliable respect in the slave quarters; many slaves consider her untrustworthy because she allegedly
identifies so completely with the culture that oppresses them.
WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE “MAMMY” STEREOTYPE?


THINK ABOUT A STEREOTYPE OF A GROUP THAT YOU BELONG TO:
WHAT IS THE STEREOTYPE? HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL? IS THE STEREOTYPE HURTFUL?
DO YOU THINK THIS STEREOTYPE IGNORES INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES?
INTERVIEW ACTIVITY

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS YOU WATCH THE INTERVIEW WITH DR. KIMBERLY WALLACE-SANDERS.

INTRODUCTION – INSPIRATION (0:00 – 3:00)

WHO IS DR. KIMBERLY WALLACE-SANDERS?

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FOR WHAT TWO REASONS DID DR. WALLACE-SANDERS CHOOSE TO NAME THE EXHIBIT “FRAMING SHADOWS”?

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THE LANGMUIR COLLECTION (3:05 – 8:47)

WHAT ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHS THEMSELVES MAKES THE LANGMUIR AFRICAN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION AT EMORY UNIVERSITY SO UNIQUE?

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WHAT ASPECTS AND/OR FEATURES SHOULD WE ANALYZE WHEN LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE PHOTOGRAPHS IN THIS EXHIBITION?

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INTERVIEW ACTIVITY

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS YOU WATCH THE INTERVIEW WITH DR. KIMBERLY WALLACE-SANDERS.

A 360° APPROACH (8:52 – 13:00)

OFTEN TIMES ONLY THE POINT OF VIEW OF WHITE SOUTHERNERS WHO WERE CARED FOR BY AFRICAN AMERICAN NANNIES IS REMEMBERED. WHAT ARE SOME OTHER PERSPECTIVES DR. WALLACE-SANDERS WANTS US TO THINK ABOUT WHEN VIEWING FRAMING SHADOWS FROM A 360° APPROACH?

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DR. WALLACE-SANDERS BRIEFLY MENTIONED THAT DISPLAYING THE PORTRAITS IN THE EXHIBITION ON THE WALLS OF A ROTUNDA HELPS CONTRIBUTE TO THE 360° APPROACH. HOW DO YOU THINK VIEWING THE PORTRAITS ONLINE, AS YOU HAVE DONE, DIFFERS FROM VIEWING THEM IN PERSON AS DR. WALLACE-SANDERS INTENDED THE EXHIBITION TO BE EXPERIENCED? COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE EXPERIENCE OF VIEWING THESE PORTRAITS IN-PERSON AND ONLINE.

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INTERVIEW ACTIVITY

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS YOU WATCH THE INTERVIEW WITH DR. KIMBERLY WALLACE-SANDERS.

THE CARETAKER CHILD RELATIONSHIP (13:00 – 17:12)

AS DR. WALLACE-SANDERS SAYS, VIEWING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WHITE CHILDREN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN NANNIES IN THESE PHOTOGRAPHS AS ONE OF AFFECTION AND LOVE IS A SUPERFICIAL READING. WHAT DO YOU THINK REALLY HAPPENED TO THE CHILDREN OF THE WOMEN IN THESE PHOTOGRAPHS? HOW DO YOU THINK THESE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN MANAGED THEIR ROLES AS MOTHERS AND CARETAKERS TO CHILDREN WHO WERE NOT THEIR OWN?

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WRITING ACTIVITY

NAME:

DATE:

"IN THE PORTRAIT [ON THE LEFT], THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN HAS ACTUALLY FALLEN ASLEEP WHILE WAITING FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHER TO GET READY. YOU CAN SEE THAT HER ARMS ARE RELAXED, AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER OR A PARENT PUT THE BABY ON HER LAP WHILE SHE WAS ASLEEP. THE PORTRAIT IS SO PROFOUND BECAUSE IT IS A WAY OF REMINDING US OF THE LABOR INVOLVED IN TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN."

- DR. KIMBERLY WALLACE-SANDERS

WRITING PROMPT: IN WHAT WAYS DOES THIS PORTRAIT REVEAL HOW THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN IS VIEWED AS A PROP TO THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND FAMILY OF THE WHITE CHILD RATHER THAN AS A VALUED MEMBER OF THEIR FAMILY/COMMUNITY?