

BLACK PHOTO BOOTH



Mariame Kaba

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I've been collecting found images of Black people for many years. Some of my favorites are photo booth portraits. They often show Black people of different ages, genders, classes in serious and also playful poses. Usually, there are no names listed so these anonymous people invite the viewer to use their imagination in crafting a story about their lives.



The photo booth was particularly popular during the 1940s, '50s and '60s.

BLACK PHOTO BOOTH



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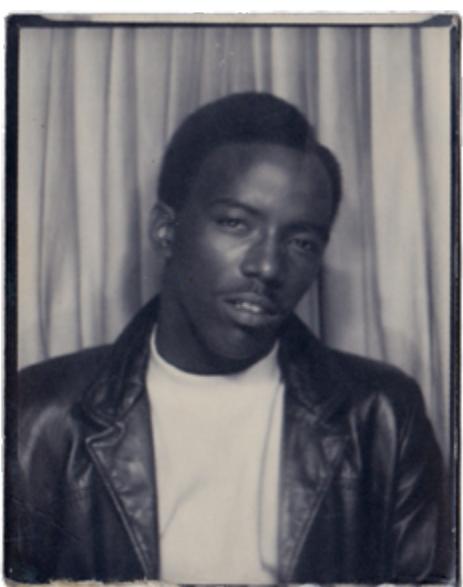
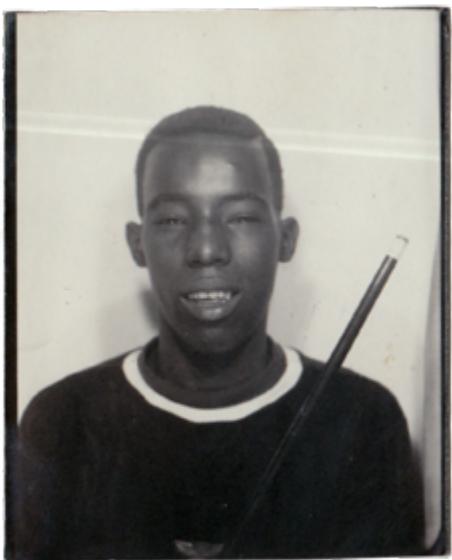


After World War II, more than 30,000 photo booths could be found in dime stores, train stations and various tourist destinations.

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Siberian immigrant Anatol Josepho patented the first fully-automatic photo booth in 1925. In 1927, the New York Times described Josepho's invention, the Photomaton, in this way: a coin-in-the-slot machine which would automatically develop the photographs, dry them and deliver them.

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The Photomaton cost \$1,000 to make and was built in a loft in Harlem. It proved so successful that Josepho was paid million (around \$2 million today) plus future royalties for the right to mass produce his photo booth.

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By September 1925 he opened the Photomaton Studio at Broadway and 51st Street in New York City and with three booths, attracted as many as 7,500 people a day leading to 280,000 customers in the first six months. The Broadway store was open till 4 a.m., with much of the business taking place at night. For 25 cents, you would receive a strip of eight photos in eight minutes.

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Photo booth images are intimate portraits that allow the subject to represent themselves as they'd like. Enter the booth, draw the curtain and, make your own art. These images are a precursor to what we think of today as DIY (Do It Yourself) culture. So these images are particularly suited to being compiled in a zine.

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Black Photo Booth is a sample of my collection of portraits. I don't collect to keep items in a shoebox or in storage out of public view. I collect things as a way to spark conversation, to teach, to provoke, and to delight. I hope that you enjoy this offering.

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Marijane Kappa