



GALLERY. RESEARCH. COLLECTIONS.

## THE BLACK STAR COLLECTION AT RYERSON UNIVERSITY

Ryerson University is the home of the famous Black Star Collection of approximately 292,000 black and white photojournalistic photographs that represent the personalities, events and conflicts of the 20th century. The Collection features images of historical subjects including the Great Wars, European history, the American Civil Rights movement, as well as major international political and cultural figures, popular culture, and early space exploration.

Assembled over a period of eighty years at the Black Star photo agency in New York City, the photographs in the Black Star Collection span from c. 1910 to 1992, with the majority of the photographs taken during the golden age of photojournalism, from the late '30s into the '70s. The black and white photographs in the Collection were created by more than 6,000 different image-makers, many of whom helped to define picture journalism. Working collaboratively in New York City with the founders and editors of weekly magazines, including *Life*, *Look* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, these photographers established the norms of the published photo-essay.

The New York-based Black Star Agency was started in 1935 by three Jewish intellectuals when they were exiled from Germany. Ernest Mayer, who was the owner of the Berlin-based Mauritius photo agency, transported some 5,000 images from his agency to New York. Together with fellow émigrés Kurt Safranski, a literary editor, and Kurt Kornfeld, a literary agent, they founded The Black Star Agency and established it in New York City's Graybar Building near Grand Central Station. The Black Star Agency represented photographers who documented significant people and events around the world in news photos and photo essays, for such clients as *Life* magazine, *Look*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Redbook*, *McCall's*, *Cosmopolitan*, the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, *Newsweek*, and many other major publications. A shortlist of the agency's photographers includes Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Andreas Feininger, Germaine Krull, Philippe Halsmann, Martin Munkacsi, W. Eugene Smith, Marion Post-Wolcott, Bill Brandt, and Mario Giancomelli. Ben and Howard Chapnik worked at the Black Star Agency with Mayer, Safranski and Kornfeld before taking it over in 1963. The Black Star Agency continues to exist in New York, under the presidency of Ben Chapnik.

The Collection is particularly well-known for its coverage in:

- European and American life before the Second World War
- The Second World War, Spanish Civil War, and Japanese invasion of China
- Post-war life in Europe and The United States of America
- The Civil Rights era, for which the Collection is particularly distinguished
- The Vietnam War, including the French phase
- 20<sup>th</sup> Century political figures
- American presidents
- Popular culture: trends, lifestyles, and headline events
- Personalities in sports, entertainment, and cultural fields
- Fashion photographs
- Scientific advancement in diverse fields, particularly space exploration

The Black Star Collection is the largest gift of cultural property ever made to a Canadian university. In 2005, the Black Star Collection was gifted to Ryerson University, along with \$7 million for its preservation, study and exhibition, by an anonymous donor. In receiving this gift, the university has been entrusted with preserving these photographs and making them accessible to the public through exhibition and publication.

In addition to the Black Star Collection, the Ryerson Image Centre's collection includes fine art photography and a growing number of artist archives, including those of Wendy Snyder MacNeil, Jo Spence and Werner Wolff.