

Gillian Laub: Southern Rites **Pre-Visit Experience**

Artist Video Introduction

Watch Gillian Laub's Artist Video Introduction about her photography practice, then answer the questions below.

It may be helpful to read the discussion questions and then watch the video again.

Discussion Questions

After watching Photographer Gillian Laub's introductory video, consider the following questions:

1. "Photography is about engaging in the world, with the world, with the people I'm photographing," said Gillian Laub.

How do you engage **in** the world?

How do you engage **with** the world?

Describe how you see the quote reflected in Gillian's images.

2. What do you think is the magic of photography?

3. Gillian states, “The best way that I could photograph the overt racism was the actual segregated proms, which were obviously a symptom of something larger.”

If the segregated proms were a symptom, what do you think was the larger issue?
In your opinion, is that issue still present today?

4. Gillian states, during interviews she asked the students and parents,
“Why is this still going on? How is this still going on?”

What is the difference between **why** segregated proms occurred and **how** segregated proms occurred?

5. There are two types of racial segregation:

- a. **De jure** segregation **was** racial separation that was mandated by law and enforced by the government. Legislation that was passed during the Civil Rights Movement ended de jure segregation.
- b. **De facto** segregation **is** the separation of people that occurs due to the legacy of past laws and contemporary behavior rather than by current legally imposed requirements. De facto segregation exists in practice but is not necessarily ordered by law.

In 2009, *The New York Times* magazine published Gillian's photo essay of the segregated proms. Nationally, there was outrage that segregated proms were occurring. Because of the outrage, the school was forced to hold its first integrated prom the next year. This is an example of de facto segregation.

Why do you think de facto segregation existed in Mt. Vernon, Georgia in 2009?

6. Gillian speaks of the tragic murder of Justin Patterson. She speaks of the community being grateful for the attention, saying, "There were people who thought there was progress because this murder even made it into the courts." The fact that it was even reported on was progress.

Read the article in *Time* magazine, [*Southern Rites: The Heartbreaking Story of Justin Patterson's Death*](#).

What additional information did you learn by reading the article?

7. The curator of the exhibition, Maya Benton, spoke of photography as visual activism. How would you define visual activism?

8. How do you think photography can affect social change?

9. "I fundamentally believe in art being able to make change, and I believe that art is a vehicle to engage in conversation, and conversation is really where change begins." said Gillian Laub.

How have you seen art make change?