How have black bodies been depicted through photography, a mechanical and “objective” medium that has historically claimed to offer a direct index of reality? How do photographic images (as documentation, archives, art, or advertising) influence cultural understandings of blackness historically and through the present day? In what ways have artists of the African diaspora used photography to create their own conceptions of black identity and/or to meditate on the world around them? This class investigates the complex relationship between photography and the African Diaspora from the photograph’s invention in 1839 through present day digital imagery. We will study a range of photographic genres, including fine arts and avant-garde practices, portraiture, photo books, advertising, and political, social, and scientific documentary. Most of our study will focus on images of African Americans within the history of the United States, although European and African contexts and image-making occasionally inform our investigation as well. Readings will include a textbook on black photographers alongside key historical and theoretical reflections on photography of and by black people.