

Post-Processing for B&W Photographs

The Woodlands Camera Club
Post-Processing SIG
March 18, 2019

Topics

- Introduction to B&W Imaging - Mike Schaffner
- Processing in LR Classic CC - Don & Mac
- Processing with LR (PS where needed) and Nik Silver Efex Pro - Mike Schaffner

Processing For Black & White

Post-Processing SIG

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Jamie and Heather Jamie Schneider (Folk Photography) our club speakers in February, 2019 discussing why they choose B&W for portraits:

WHY BLACK AND WHITE?

- ▶ CLASSIC AND TIMELESS
- ▶ PULLS YOU IN AND MAKES YOU NOTICE SMALL DETAILS
- ▶ HONEST AND DISTRACTION FREE
- ▶ LOOKS GOOD IN ANY HOME WITH ANY DECOR

Rob Wood – Light Stalking

(lightstalking.com)

- ▶ How much longevity do your photos have?
- ▶ A HDR landscape on Instagram probably has a shelf life of a day or two. Maybe a week. In a few years the fad will disappear if it hasn't already.
- ▶ A black and white family or individual portrait *might have a shelf life of 200 years* if a few things go right.
- ▶ **The images stay relevant.**
- ▶ But it is a long way from easy. Photos that look good in your viewfinder or LCD or even on your computer screen more often than not look terrible as black and whites.

Some Basic Questions

- ▶ Have you taken photos that look better in color than B&W?
- ▶ Have you taken photos that look better in B&W than color?
- ▶ Have you taken photos that look good in both color and B&W?
 - ▶ Did both versions look good for the same reason?
- ▶ What makes a good B&W photo and how do we learn to see those attributes?

Recognizing The Attributes Of A Good B&W

- ▶ Close your eyes and keep them closed until instructed to open them
- ▶ Upon opening your eyes list **the attributes** the immediately grab your attention.
 - ▶ Describe what attributes you see
 - ▶ Examples: color, tone, texture, mood, emotion, light & shadow, contrasts, complementary color, lines, shapes, patterns
 - ▶ Describe the attributes, not the subject
 - ▶ Don't overthink this – give your immediate reaction – if it takes more than 3 seconds to see an attribute, you're overthinking it.



Alec
Johnson



Alec
Johnson

Where Does B&W Excel?

- ▶ **Eliminate distraction** – Black and white can help focus our attention on the subject by de-emphasizing the background colors.
- ▶ **Tonal range** – Tone is the result of mixing a pure color with any neutral/grayscale color including the two extremes white and black. Black and white photography is especially well suited to show the full tonal range from pure white to pure black.
- ▶ **Contrast** – Contrast is the difference in brightness between light and dark areas of an image. Black and white as is implicit in the name highlights this difference.



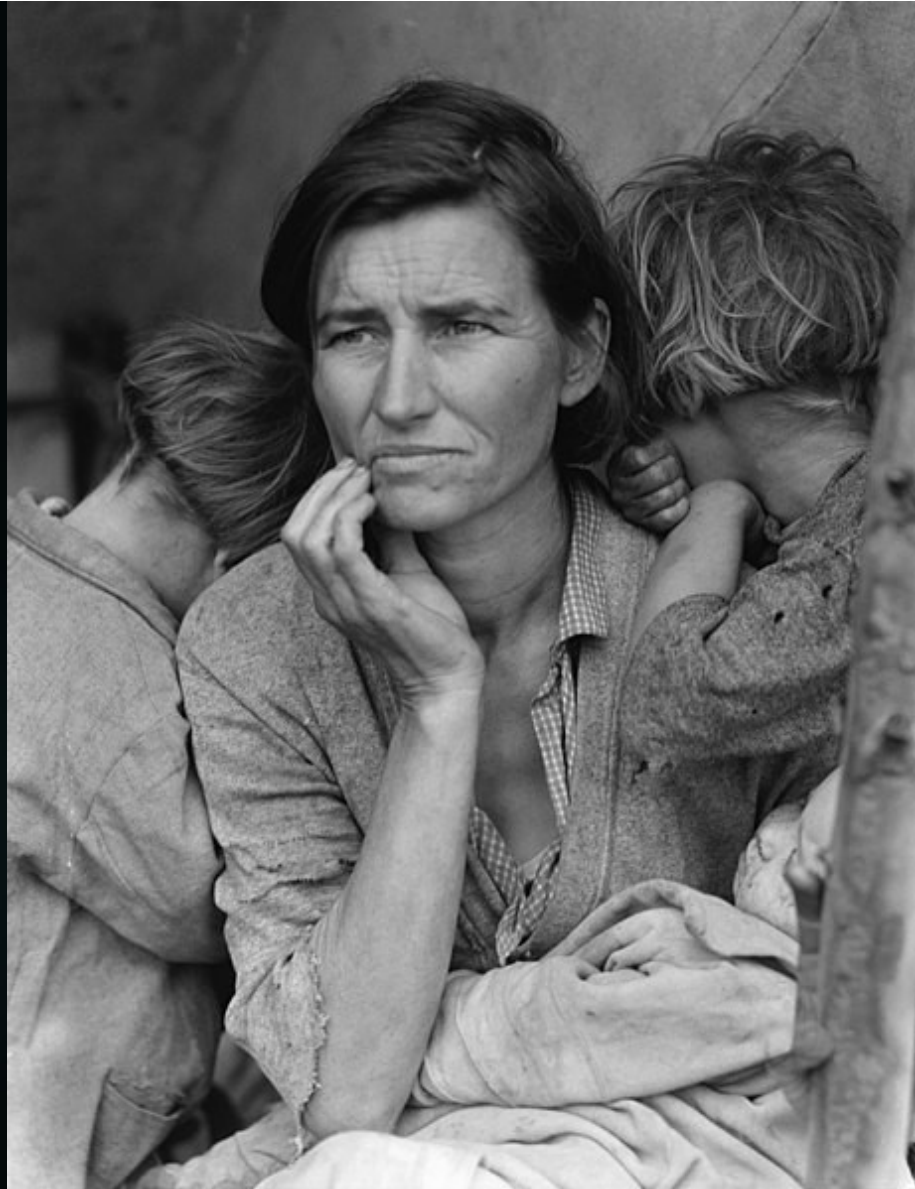
Lauren
Lim



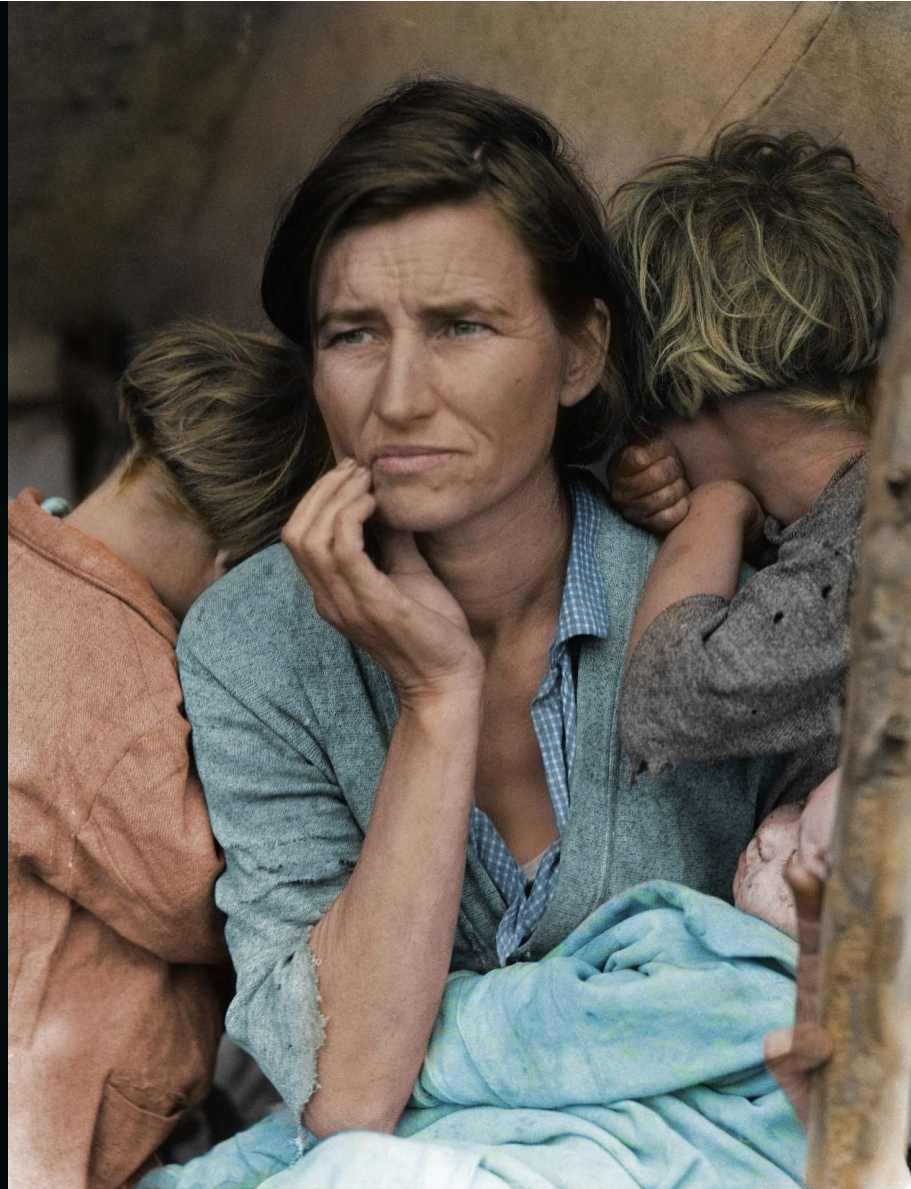
Lauren
Lim

Where Does B&W Excel?

- ▶ **Light, shadow and chiaroscuro** – Black and white photos work well with highlighting light (lower tonal values) and shadow (higher tonal values) and also the values in between as we go from light to dark (chiaroscuro - an effect of contrasted light and shadow created by light falling unevenly or from a particular direction on something).
- ▶ **Texture and details** – Side lighting produces surface shadows and contrasts emphasizing a three-dimensional texture portrayed in a two-dimensional photo.
- ▶ **Convey Strong Emotion** – Color can overpower other attributes in a photo masking our ability to see and appreciate those other attributes. Removing color allows the other attributes to become more apparent and to create a mood and emotional feeling.



Migrant
Mother by
Dorthea
Lange, 1936



Original photo
by Dorothea
Lange.
Colorized by
John Boero

Understanding The Importance Of Color in B&W Processing

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- ▶ Q: How many colors are in this image?
- ▶ A: A lot

Understanding The Importance Of Color in B&W Processing

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▶ Q: How many colors are in this image? (Hint B&W is often called *monochrome*)

▶ A: One (Black)

White is the absence of color. There are a lot black tones. Tone is the result of mixing a pure color with any neutral/grayscale color including the two extremes white and black

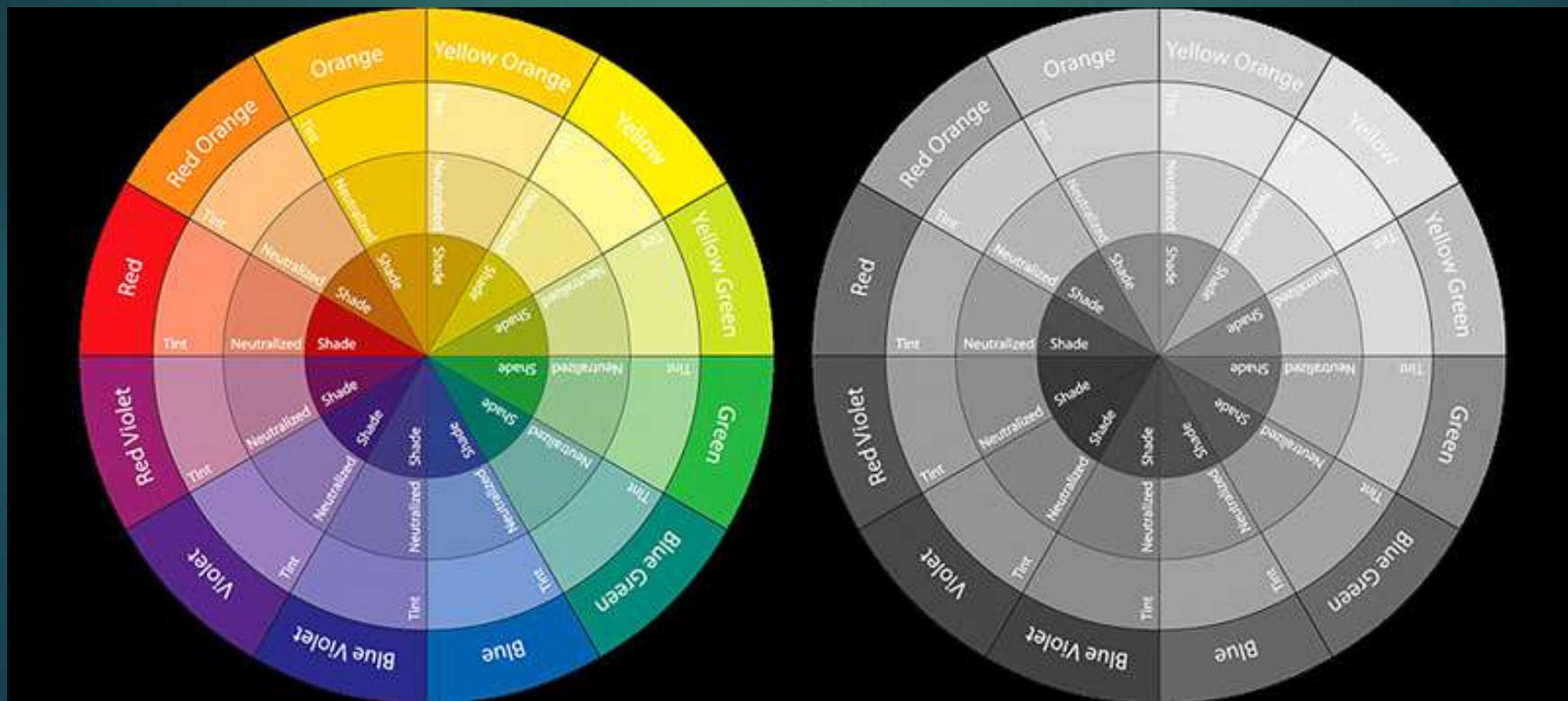
Understanding The Importance Of Color in B&W Processing

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- ▶ 2 Key elements of converting color to B&W
 - ▶ Tonal Contrast
 - Look for light and dark areas
 - ▶ Color Contrast
 - Look for complementary colors

Understanding The Importance Of Color in B&W Processing



Understanding The Importance Of Color in B&W Processing

- ▶ The key to processing B&W is to *emphasize or create*:
 - ▶ Tonal Contrast
 - ▶ Color Contrast
- ▶ So what does this mean?
 - ▶ The “color” image you may want to process to B&W may not be a good “color” image!
 - ▶ “Photos that look good in your viewfinder or LCD or even on your computer screen more often than not look terrible as black and whites.”

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- ▶ How to *emphasize* or create Tonal Contrast and Color Contrast in:
 - ▶ Lightroom
 - ▶ Photoshop
 - ▶ NIK Silver Efex Pro

Processing B&W in Lightroom Classic CC

B&W Conversion Methods in LR

- Conversion choices - Treatment (keyboard shortcut “V”), Profile, or Preset
- Treatment as a first step just changes the Profile to Adobe Monochrome which may or may not achieve the starting look you want in your image
- The Profile browser shows 17 B&W Profiles included with LR Classic; others are available free or for purchase from various sources
- Choosing one of the B&W Profiles does not move any of the sliders but will change the Color/HSL edit section to B&W
- NOTE: Some B&W Profiles available from other sources achieve the conversion in other ways and leave the HSL/Color edit section available for full color range control

B&W Conversion Methods in LR (cont'd)

- Develop Presets for B&W conversion
 - ◆ 10 included in LR Classic - include a Profile change PLUS other adjustments
 - ◆ More available for download (free or for purchase)
 - ◆ Make your own: Convert and edit a photo, create a new preset (“plus” at right of Preset Panel), select all appropriate settings (including profile), select “Create.”
- When to convert
 - ◆ Any point in workflow, but recommend EARLY
 - ◆ Presets can change adjustments you’ve already made
 - ◆ Use as a starting point

Example Workflow

- Think about your main subjects, creative objectives, compositional goals, desired impacts
- Make a virtual copy that you plan to convert, or save “original” as a snapshot
- Reset Basic and Tone Curve settings
- Apply desired Profile and/or Preset (see Conversion Methods above)
- Apply Lens Corrections, Crop (R) and/or Transform to optimize spatial composition

Example Workflow (cont'd)

- Basic Panel: Consider “Auto” as a starting point (optional)
- Refine basic adjustments
 - ◆ How much “B&W contrast” do you want? Where?
 - ◆ Consider more contrast and/or clarity for more “punch”
 - ◆ Negative clarity softens overall look
 - ◆ Watch the histogram to maximize dynamic range without clipping (unless you WANT something else)
- Consider tone curve for “high key,” “low key,” “film noir”

Example Workflow (cont'd)

The B&W Mixer

- B&W Conversions RETAIN COLOR INFORMATION
- B&W Mixer allows individual luminance adjustments for 8 specific color ranges
- Can simulate the effect of lens filters
- Typical effects:
 - ◆ darken blue skies for more drama
 - ◆ lighten/darken green (& yellow) foliage to change emphasis areas
 - ◆ create contrast between objects of different colors but similar luminance
- NOTE: Effects are global — watch for unintended consequences

Example Workflow (cont'd)

- Use local adjustments (gradient, radial, and brush) as in color processing, including range masking. This is a way to emphasize/deemphasize objects/areas locally.
- Use split toning to simulate traditional B&W printing methods such as sepia and selenium.
- Use effects to create both light and dark vignettes, and to apply a range of simulated film grain.
- If you started with a snapshot, take another snapshot of your “final” image.