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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE WAY IT WAS

It's unlikely that history will locate Henry Clay Anderson, a Greenville, Mississippi, studio photographer most active in the fifties and sixties, alongside Harlem's James VanDerZee, Paris's Nadar, Mali's Seydou Keita, and others who turned commercial portraiture into an art. But Anderson's pictures of middle-class Southern blacks in the civil-



rights era are full of matter-of-fact revelations. A show at Kasher includes portraits of men and women dressed up for the prom, the office, or Sunday services, and posed in Anderson's spare storefront studio. Some of these same people appear in a crowd gathered to mourn the Reverend George Lee, whose efforts to register black voters ended with his assassination, in 1955. Segregation and intimidation were the backdrop against which Anderson's subjects stood—determined, unbowed. “I made pictures of things that to me were amazing,” Anderson said late in life. Nothing is more amazing than the steady passage from endurance to resistance that he records here.

—Vince Aletti
