



The Scurlock Studio and Black Washington: Picturing The Promise

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Nearly a century's worth of Scurlock photographs combine to form a searing portrait of black Washington in all its guises—its challenges and its victories, its dignity and its determination. Beginning in the early twentieth century and continuing into the 1990s, Addison Scurlock, followed by his sons, Robert and George, used their cameras to document and celebrate a community unique in the world, and a stronghold in the history and culture of the nation's capital.

Through photographs of formal weddings, elegant cotillions, ballet studios, and quiet family life, the Scurlocks revealed a world in which the black middle class refused to be defined or held captive by discrimination. From its home on the vibrant U Street corridor, the Scurlock Studio gave us indelible images of leaders and luminaries, of high society and working class, of Washingtonians at work and at play. In photograph after photograph, the Scurlocks captured an optimism and resiliency seldom seen in mainstream depictions of segregated society.

Luminaries such as Duke Ellington, Ralph Bunche, Mary McLeod Bethune, Alain Locke, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Lois Mailou Jones testify to the intellectual and cultural vibrancy that was unique to Washington and an inspiration to the nation. Photographs of a Peoples Drugstore protest and Marian Anderson's Easter morning concert at the Lincoln Memorial remind us that the struggle for equality in black Washington began long before the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Offering a rich lens into our past, *The Scurlock Studio and Black Washington* is a powerful trigger of personal and historical memory.

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