



# Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present

*Deborah Willis*

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**A triumphant celebration of the power of family, endurance, spirituality, and the diverse range of the African American experience over the last two centuries.**

*Reflections in Black*, the first comprehensive history of black photographers, is Deborah Willis's long-awaited, groundbreaking assemblage of photographs of African American life from 1840 to the present. Willis, a curator of photography at the Smithsonian Institution, has selected nearly 600 stunning images that give us rich, hugely moving glimpses of black life, from slavery to the Great Migrations, from rare antebellum portraits to 1990s middle-class families. Featuring the work of undisputed masters such as James Presley Ball, C. M. Battey, James VanDerZee, Morgan and Marvin Smith, Gordon Parks, Moneta Sleet, Jr., and Carrie Mae Weems, among hundreds of others, *Reflections in Black* is, most powerfully, a refutation of the gross caricature of the many mainstream photographers who have continually emphasized poverty over family, despair over hope. Recalling Roman Vishniac's *Vanished World* in terms of its documentary importance, and Brian Lanker's *I Dream a World* in terms of its exceptional beauty, *Reflections in Black* is not only an exceptional gift book for any occasion but also a work so significant that it has the power to reconfigure our conception of American history itself. It demands to be included in every American family's library as the record of an essential part of our heritage. Publication will coincide and tie in with a major exhibition at The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, which will then travel to Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Albany, New York; Corpus Christi, Texas; and other cities.

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