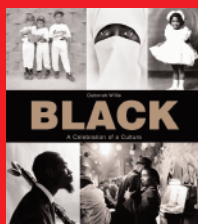
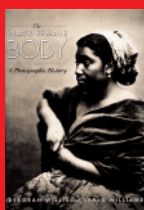
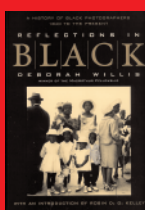




— photo credit: Winston Kennedy



Photographer, Professor of Photography and Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, former Curator of Exhibitions at the Smithsonian's Center for African American History and Culture. Her awards and fellowships include a MacArthur "genius" Fellowship, The International Center for Photography Infinity Award for Writing in Photography and The Golden Light Photography Book of the Year. Her books include *BLACK: A Celebration of Culture* (December, 2003), *VanDerZee: The Portraits of James VanDerZee*, *The Black Female Body* with Carla Williams, and many others. She has taught the history of photography at New York University, City University of New York, and the Brooklyn Museum.

The Programs

Reflections in Black

A lecture/slide program

A monumental collection of photographs of African American life, *REFLECTIONS IN BLACK: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* is the first ever comprehensive history of African American photographers, presenting nearly 600 images of black American life, over 100 of them never before seen.

**REFLECTIONS IN BLACK** is a triumphant celebration of family, endurance, spirituality, and the diverse range of black experience over the last two centuries, overturning many common ideas about black life, and through its sheer power rewriting American history itself.

Deborah Willis gives us rich, poignant glimpses of African American life from slavery to the Great Migrations of the 1920s, from rare antebellum daguerreotypes to the Harlem Renaissance, from the Civil Rights era to the postmodern art photography of the 1990s.

Exploring the backgrounds, careers, personal thematic interests and artistic gifts of hundreds of African American photographers throughout the United States, Willis explains that these "high tech griots" have consistently produced counter-images to the caricatured representations of (generally white) photographers that have emphasized poverty over family, despair over hope. Each of their images suggests an astonishing, often spellbinding story. For example, Augustus Washington's mid-nineteenth century portraits of African Americans offer a window of seeming calm in an American era known largely for its upheaval. And a startling suite of J.P. Ball photographs depicts, in three images, the life, death, and burial of a black man hanged for murder.

Equally arresting are the images of the twentieth century, from James VanDerZee's glittering shot of a Harlem couple decked out in raccoon coats, to Clarissa Sligh's fascinating peeks at African Americans submitting to the deceptively mundane chores of haircuts and church-going. Also in **REFLECTIONS IN BLACK** are celebrity images, including priceless photographs of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King, Jr., Sarah Vaughn, Malcolm X and Muhammed Ali.

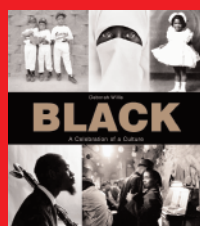
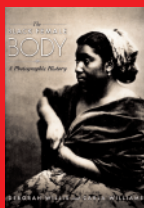
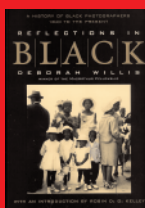
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An epic visual record filled with bold and unexpected images, **REFLECTIONS IN BLACK** is both the previously unacknowledged heritage of an astonishingly diverse community and a glowing portfolio of photographic reportage and artistry produced by a vast range of photographic sensibilities. It is a work so significant that it has the power to reconfigure the imagination.

The exhibit “Reflections in Black” opened at the Smithsonian Institution in 2000 and has traveled the country for three years.

**BLACK: A CELEBRATION OF CULTURE**

Black: A Celebration of a Culture looks at the way in which culture is constructed through photographs. Photographing friends, people and places, family members, and their possessions is a transformative act that one hopes instills a sense of joy and dignity in the subject, photographer, and viewer. Since the beginning of photography, individual portraits, family photographs, and community events have embodied that special connection, and they can be viewed as evidence of special moments and used to illustrate a story.

“In constructing a black-culture photo story through collective memory...I thought about photographers’ works that focus on black life, photographs that celebrate and tell a story about everyday life. The photographs explored, documented and reinforced common cultures within African American communities whether through style of dress or through celebrations. Themes explored in this book include everyday life—family life, spirituality, celebrations, portraiture, beauty, memory, and the arts. We are all familiar with images of the struggle for equal rights in America, which document an important aspect of the American experience, but I wondered about the photographs that show how photographers recorded what people do on Saturday night and Sunday morning, and the ways in which we all commemorate family or cultural events.

Looking at photographs produced in the 1930s next to photographs made in 2003, I began to see linkages on the Saturday night/Sunday morning theme—Saturday mornings of leisure time, shopping, going to the beauty salons and barber shops; Saturday nights of dancing, partying, playing cards; and familiar Sunday morning baptismal services, ministers at the pulpit, fancy hats, and proud families. By visually telling this story, I hope the viewer/reader can consider the shared experiences of black women and men.”

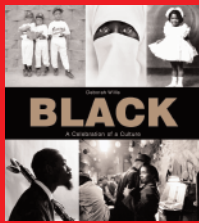
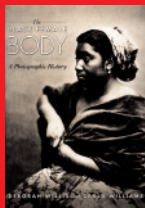
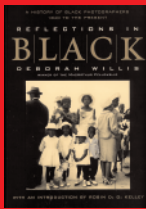
**The Black Female Body**

Searching for photographic images of black women, Deborah Willis and Carla Williams were startled to find them by the hundreds. In long-forgotten books, in art museums, in European and U.S. archives and private collections, a hidden history of representation awaited discovery. The Black Female Body offers a stunning array of familiar and many virtually unknown photographs, showing how photographs reflected and reinforced Western culture’s fascination with black women’s bodies.

In the nineteenth century, black women were rarely subjects for artistic studies but posed before the camera again and again as objects for social scientific investigation and as exotic representatives of faraway lands. South Africans, Nubians, enslaved Abyssinians and Americans, often partially or com-



— photo credit: Winston Kennedy



pletely naked and devoid of identity, were displayed for the armchair anthropologist or prurient viewer. Willis and Williams relate these social science photographs and the blatantly pornographic images of this era with those of black women as domestics and as nursemaids for white children in family portraits. As seen through the camera lens, Jezebel and Mammy took the form of real women made available to serve white society.

Here are nineteenth century portraits of well-dressed and beautifully coifed creoles of color and artistic studies of dignified black women. Here are Harlem Renaissance photographs of entertainer Josephine Baker and writer Zora Neale Hurston. Documenting the long struggle for black civil rights, the authors draw on politically pointed images by noted photographers like Dorothea Lange, Lewis Hine, and Gordon Parks. They also feature the work of contemporary artists such as Ming Smith Murray, Renee Cox, Coreen Simpson, Chester Higgins, Joy Gregory, and Catherine Opie, who photograph black women asserting their subjectivity, reclaiming their bodies, and refusing the representations of the past.

***“If a picture is truly worth a thousand words, then Deborah Willis has given us nothing less than an epic history of Homeric proportions.”***

*Robin D. G. Kelly*

“All at once, **REFLECTIONS IN BLACK** is history, narrative, a personal and public record, cultural anthropology and family album...it is a sweeping documentation of a diverse people’s collective cultural vision and voice.”

*Esther Iverem, Washington Post Book World*

“This is a historical project of critical importance to our continuing understanding of American history through the medium of photography. As always, Willis’ work is crucial to that dialogue.”

*Leslie King-Hammond, Ph.D.*

“The photographs in *Black: A Celebration of a Culture* redefine the black cultural image in America.”—

*Cheryl Finley, Ph.D.(From the Afterword)*

Deborah Willis tells this story better than it has ever been told before—or shown...the result of Willis’s groundbreaking effort is both delightful and unsettling, because it undermines our expectations with every image.”

*Malcolm Jones, Newsweek*

“The camera was the central instrument by which blacks could disprove representations of us created by white folks... For black folks, the camera provided a means to document a reality that could, if necessary, be packed, stored, moved from place to place. It was documentation that could be shared, passed around.”

*bell hooks*

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