Filling A Much Needed Void

Nearly a century's worth of Scurlock photographs combine to form a searing portrait of a 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., 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.

My Personal Review:
As a nearly lifelong resident of the Washington area and a collector of photography books, I've always wondered why there has never been any comprehensive survey of the Addison Scurlock Studio. For those who may not be acquainted with the name, Scurlock was roughly to Washington what James Van Der Zee was to New York: The man that African Americans went to for that special portrait.

After having been to the Smithsonian exhibit in the temporary location of the new African American History Museum, I bought the book and was
more than pleased to see that it easily surpassed my hopes and expectations. All aspects of the Scurlock Studio are well represented: the portraits of well known and unknown Washingtonians; the city of Washington, including events and storefronts; the visiting celebrities ranging from DuBois to Fredi Washington; and many photographs of the leaders, students and faculty of Howard University, where Addison Scurlock and his sons Robert and George were the unofficial official photographers for the better part of the 20th century.

To put my opinion of this book in a bit of personal perspective, I own nearly a thousand photography books, many of them scarce and collectible. This magnificent monograph more than holds its own among the best of them, and it belongs in the collection of any person or family who wants to understand where we've been and how we got to where we are. With its almost absurdly low list price, it's an absolute steal for anyone with an interest in either photography or African American history.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price: