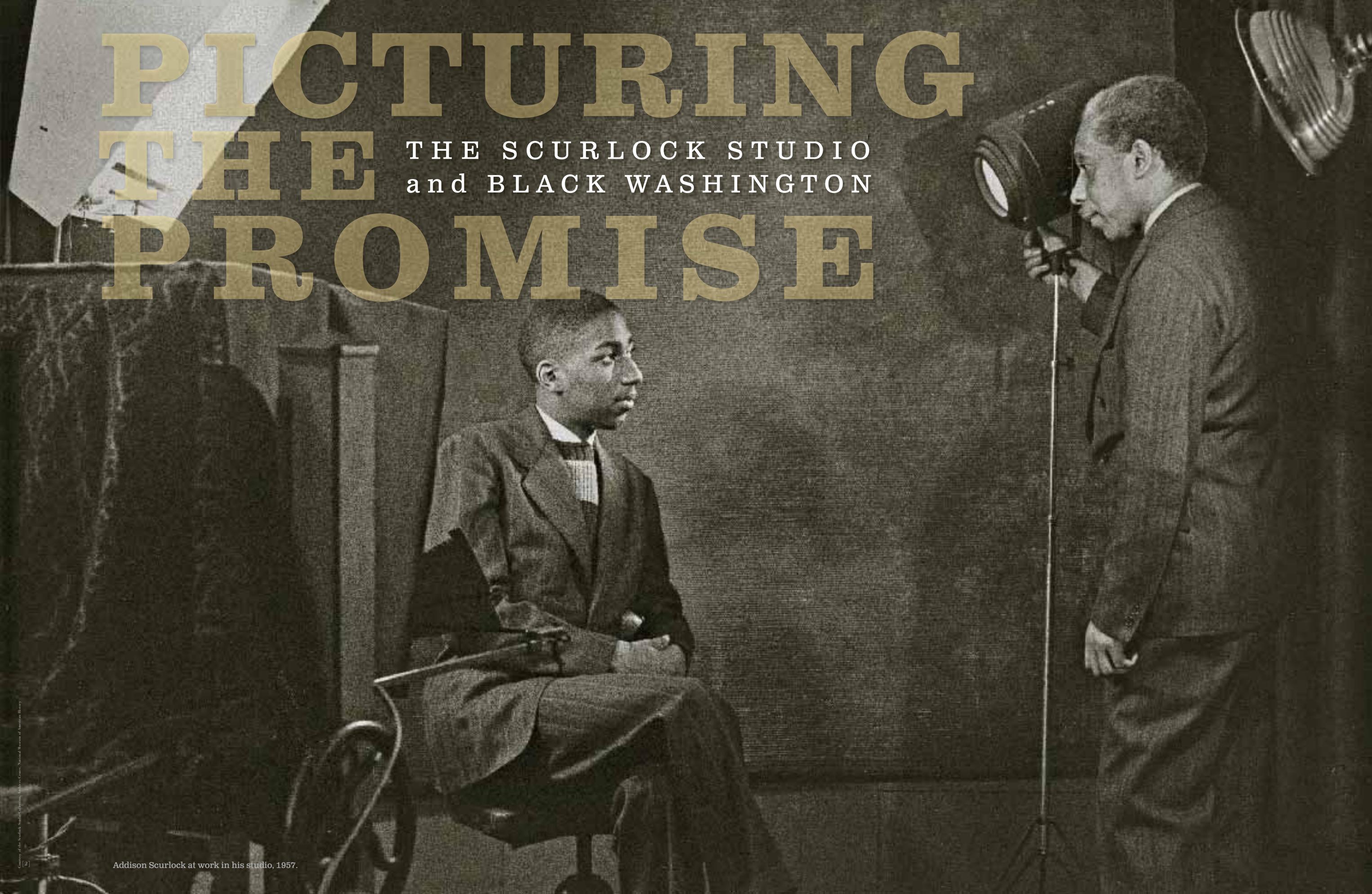


# PICTURING THE PROMISE

THE SCURLOCK STUDIO  
and BLACK WASHINGTON



Addison Scurlock at work in his studio, 1957.



Addison Scurlock was born in 1883, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, 20 years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation which led to the abolition of slavery. In 1900, he moved with his family to Washington, D.C., as part of a massive wave of migration northward by African Americans. He spent four years as an apprentice to a professional photographer learning about the business and artistry of photography in the nation's capital before striking out on his own to establish the Scurlock studio in 1911 in northwest D.C.

From 1911 to 1994, the and his sons, George and Robert, and nation. Depicting individuals, businesses in public and private spheres, of work that earned them a place among the

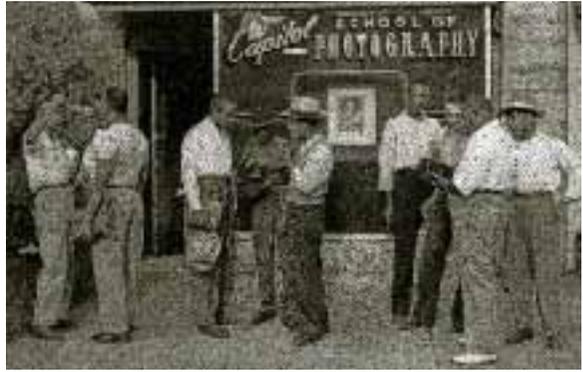


leading African American photographers of the 20th century. They fashioned a positive self-image for African Americans during a time when negative and racist stereotypes of black people predominated. Scurlock cameras were instruments to advance racial pride and justice. Scurlock photographs are testaments to the dreams and hopes of those pictured and how they wished themselves to be known and remembered. They demonstrate the promise, complexity, and centrality of the black experience in America.

photography of Addison Scurlock captured and captivated their city families, churches, groups, and Scurlock photographers created a body

THE SCURLOCKS DOCUMENTED OUR PLACE IN WASHINGTON, DARING TO REFLECT US—WHO WE ARE, HOW WE LOOK. EVERY SCURLOCK IMAGE ALMOST SHOUTS: “LOOK HOW FAR WE’VE COME. LOOK HOW PUT TOGETHER WE ARE...LOOK, THESE ARE THE FACES OF FREEDMEN. LOOK AT OUR REFLECTION, HERE IN THE CAPITAL OF OUR COUNTRY. HERE. LOOK. SEE.”  A. J. Verdelle

*At left, Addison Scurlock with large view camera, c. 1920s. Above, Addison Scurlock reviews his studio's portraits for an exhibition, 1950s.*



*His lens focused on the rich and the poor, the famous and unknown, athletes and presidents. The Scurlock camera was positive proof of the phrase, ‘Black is Beautiful,’ and the record is here for future generations to discover and enjoy.*

🌀 ROBERT SCURLOCK 🌀



“Our father would put photographs of famous people and not-so-famous people out there, and people saw this nice display and just walked in and asked if you could make them look as beautiful as the people in the [display] case.”

🌀 GEORGE SCURLOCK 🌀

*Top row, left to right: Marian Anderson’s concert at the Lincoln Memorial, Easter Sunday, 1939, was an early civil rights victory; the Capitol School of Photography (c. 1947–52) was started by Addison Scurlock’s sons Robert and George. Row two, left to right: aging Civil War-era leaders Jim Lewis, P.B.S. Pinchback and Judge Mifflin Gibbs pose in front of Pinchback’s house, c. 1905; Esther Popel Shaw, a teacher, author, activist and poet, sits with her daughter Patricia, in 1930. Bottom row, left to right: a couple dances the popular jitterbug in the 1930s; George and Robert Scurlock with their father Addison, 1950.*

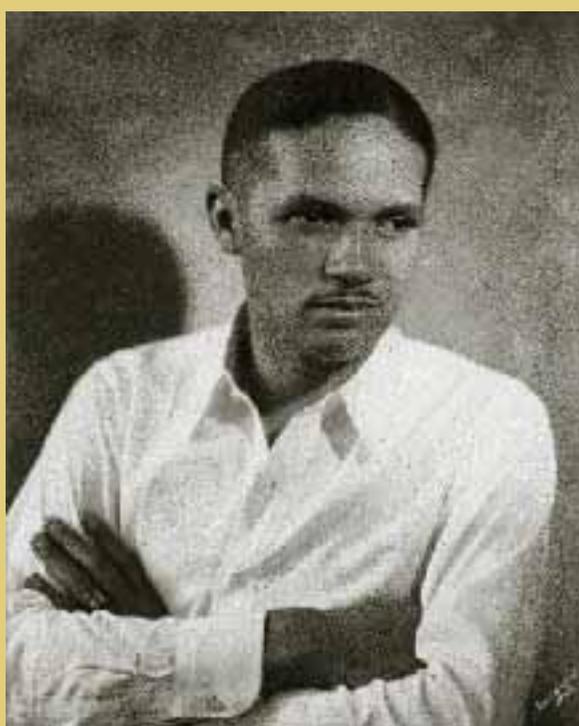
✿ The National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) is the Smithsonian’s 19th museum and is scheduled for completion in 2015. The museum already produces publications, hosts public programs, gathers collections, and presents exhibitions at its own gallery at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and at other museums.

P I C T U R I N G   T H E   P R O M I S E

P O R T R A I T S

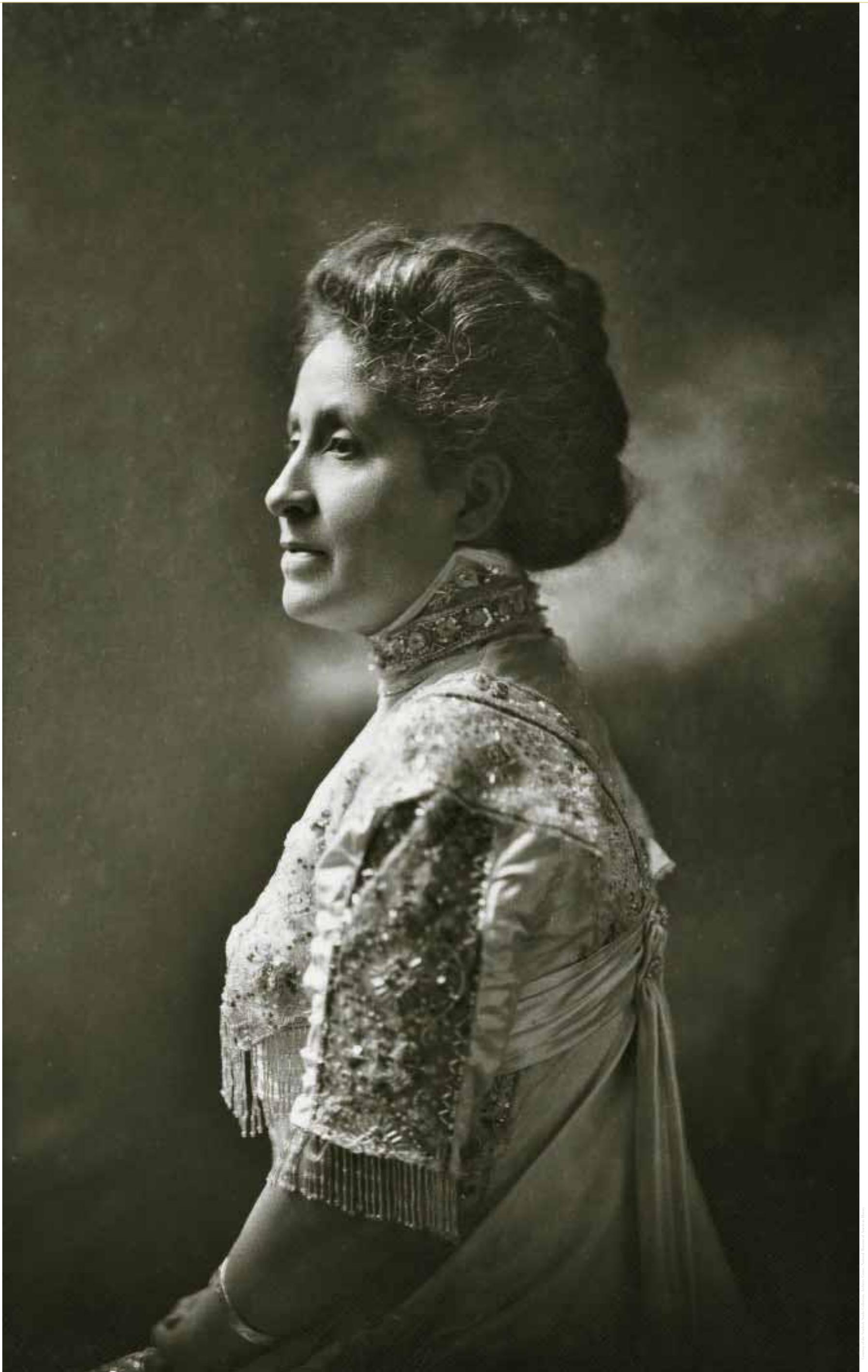
*He had a way of  
imbuing his subjects with an  
unmistakable air of dignity and with  
a presence that bespoke a quiet,  
understated power.*

🌀 JEFFREY JOHN FEARING 🌀



Together the Scurlocks built a business based on portrait clients from all walks of life. Their unique style, eye for portrait composition, and sense of the importance of racial representation has become known as the “Scurlock Look.” It has influenced generations of photographers who sought to replicate the Scurlocks’ ability to elicit meaning, authenticity, and beauty in their portraits. ✨ For decades the Scurlocks photographed individuals, families, and groups at weddings, graduations, meetings, in their homes, businesses, and places of worship. In the process they created a vital body of portraiture of important Washingtonians and visitors to a city that contained a large black middle class as well as many celebrities and distinguished leaders. The “Scurlock look” was a crucial element in constructing an image of respectability, dignity, and beauty.

*Above, left, Robert Todd Duncan, a Howard University professor, trained actor and opera singer, helped desegregate the National Theater for the Washington, D.C., run of “Porgy and Bess.” The portrait was taken in 1930. Right, educator and political activist Mary McLeod Bethune, photographed here in 1935, was an influential civil rights leader and founder of the Bethune-Cookman College in Florida and the National Council of Negro Women.*



MARY CHURCH TERRELL WAS AN ACTIVIST FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND INTEGRATION.

SCURLOCK STUDIO 1920s



JAZZ LEGEND DUKE ELLINGTON WAS A NATIVE OF WASHINGTON, D.C.



Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. National Museum of American History

ARTIST AND DESIGNER LOIS MAILOU JONES WAS ALSO AN ART PROFESSOR AT HOWARD UNIVERSITY FOR 47 YEARS.



TUSKEGEE AIRMAN BENJAMIN O. DAVIS, JR., WAS ONE OF THE FIRST U.S. ARMED FORCES' BLACK AVIATORS.

SCURLOCK STUDIO 1940s



BROADWAY AND HOLLYWOOD STAR SIDNEY POITIER, SIGNING AUTOGRAPHS, WAS THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO WIN THE ACADEMY AWARD FOR BEST ACTOR.

P I C T U R I N G   T H E   P R O M I S E

C A P T U R I N G  
T H E   C I T Y

*At a time when many reduced the African American community to caricature, the work of the Scurlocks lent richness, depth, complexity, and meaning to black Washington.*

🌀 LONNIE G. BUNCHE, III 🌀



The Scurlocks operated their business in the midst of the historic black neighborhoods surrounding the U Street corridor and Howard University in northwest Washington. Though this community existed a short distance from the White House and the U.S. Congress, segregation imposed a racial divide in the city throughout most of the 20th century. Despite the racial injustice that confined their world, entrepreneurs such as the Scurlocks and many other African American families were part of a rich and resilient community, successful in the spheres of business, education, science, arts, and entertainment. From the National Mall to U Street, Scurlock cameras documented that resilience, capturing many of black Washington's social cultural and political rhythms for nearly a century. 🌸 Their body of work reveals how they envisioned the promise of a respectable, expanding, and diverse black community, and its worlds of leisure and entertainment, art and literature, politics and protest, spirituality and social activism. It demonstrates that this urban portrait is not only central to the story of Washington, D.C., but also to the black experience in America.

*Black Broadway*

BY DAY, U STREET FEATURED HUNDREDS OF BLACK BUSINESS OWNERS AND THEIR PATRONS WHO POPULATED THE VARIOUS RESTAURANTS, BOUTIQUES, AND SERVICES THAT LINED THE STREET. AT NIGHT, THE STREET TURNED INTO A RAUCOUS CLUB AND THEATER SCENE, WHERE MUSICIANS, DANCERS, ACTORS, AND OTHER ENTERTAINERS PERFORMED AND MINGLED WITH THE HIPPEST AND MOST FASHIONABLE PEOPLE ON THE SCENE IN D.C. 🌀 Hilary Scurlock

*Top row, left to right: Civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaks at Rankin Chapel at Howard University in 1956; Railway dining car cooks pose in their galley kitchen, 1949. Bottom row, left to right: Murray Brothers Printing Company and influential Washington Tribune newspaper staff pose in front of their U Street establishment in 1925. Founder F.H. Morris Murray and his three sons are in front, far left; Educator and author Anna Julia Cooper on the porch of her LeDroit Park home in 1934.*



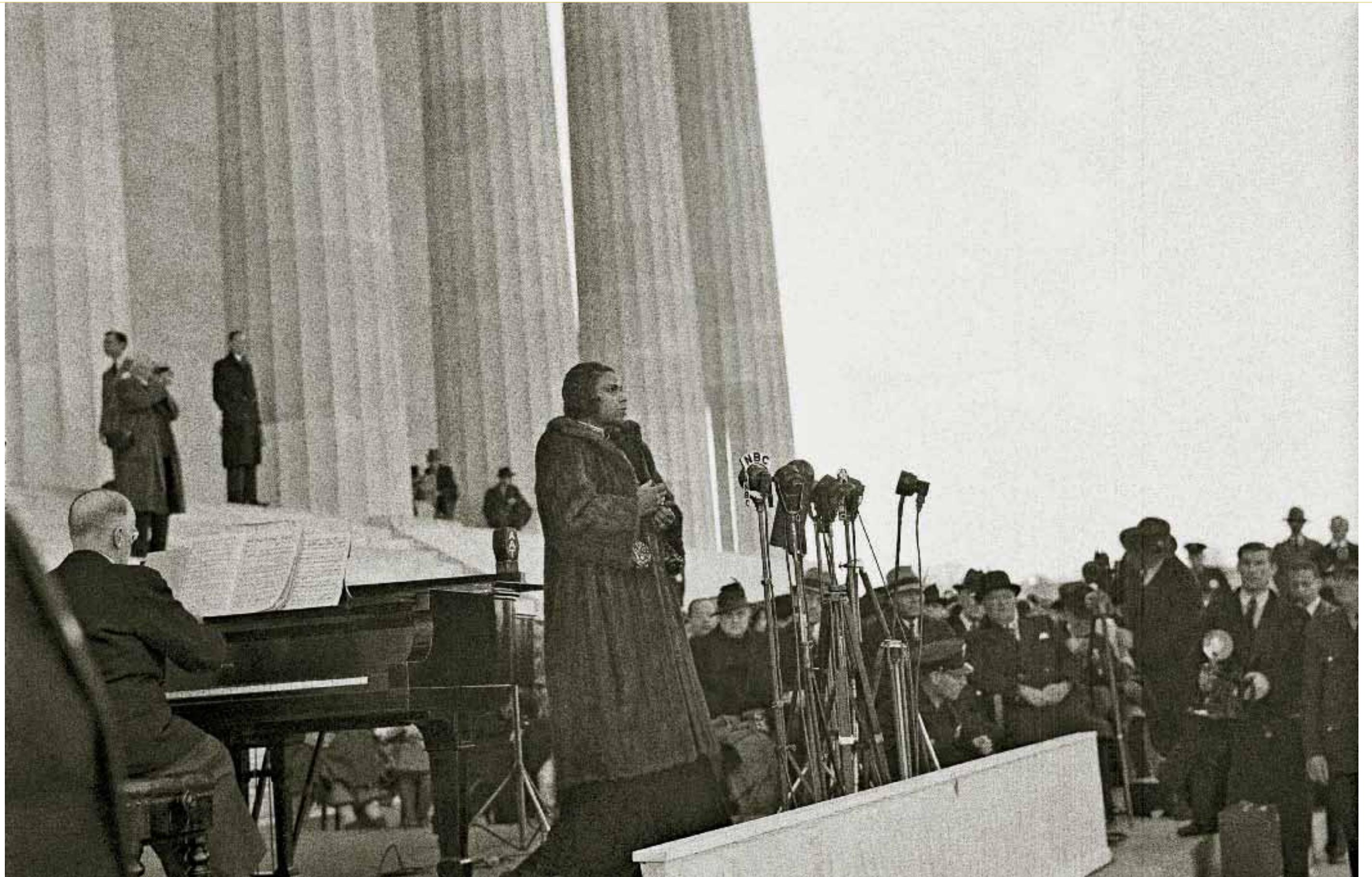
SUCCESSFUL BLACK ENTREPRENEUR ALEXANDER HAMILTON UNDERDOWN, WIFE MARGARET AND EMPLOYEES POSE IN FRONT OF THE UNDERDOWN DELICATESSEN.



THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE MIDWINTER'S BALL DREW THE INFLUENTIAL BLACK ELITE OF THE DAY ❄️ BALTIMORE, MARYLAND.



YOUNG WOMEN ATTEND AN EVENT AT GRIFFITH STADIUM, WASHINGTON, DC.



INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED OPERA SINGER MARIAN ANDERSON PERFORMS AT AN EASTER SUNDAY CONCERT AT THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL IN FRONT OF A CROWD OF 75,000.



DEMONSTRATORS ASSEMBLE FOR THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM.

H O W A R D  
U N I V E R S I T Y

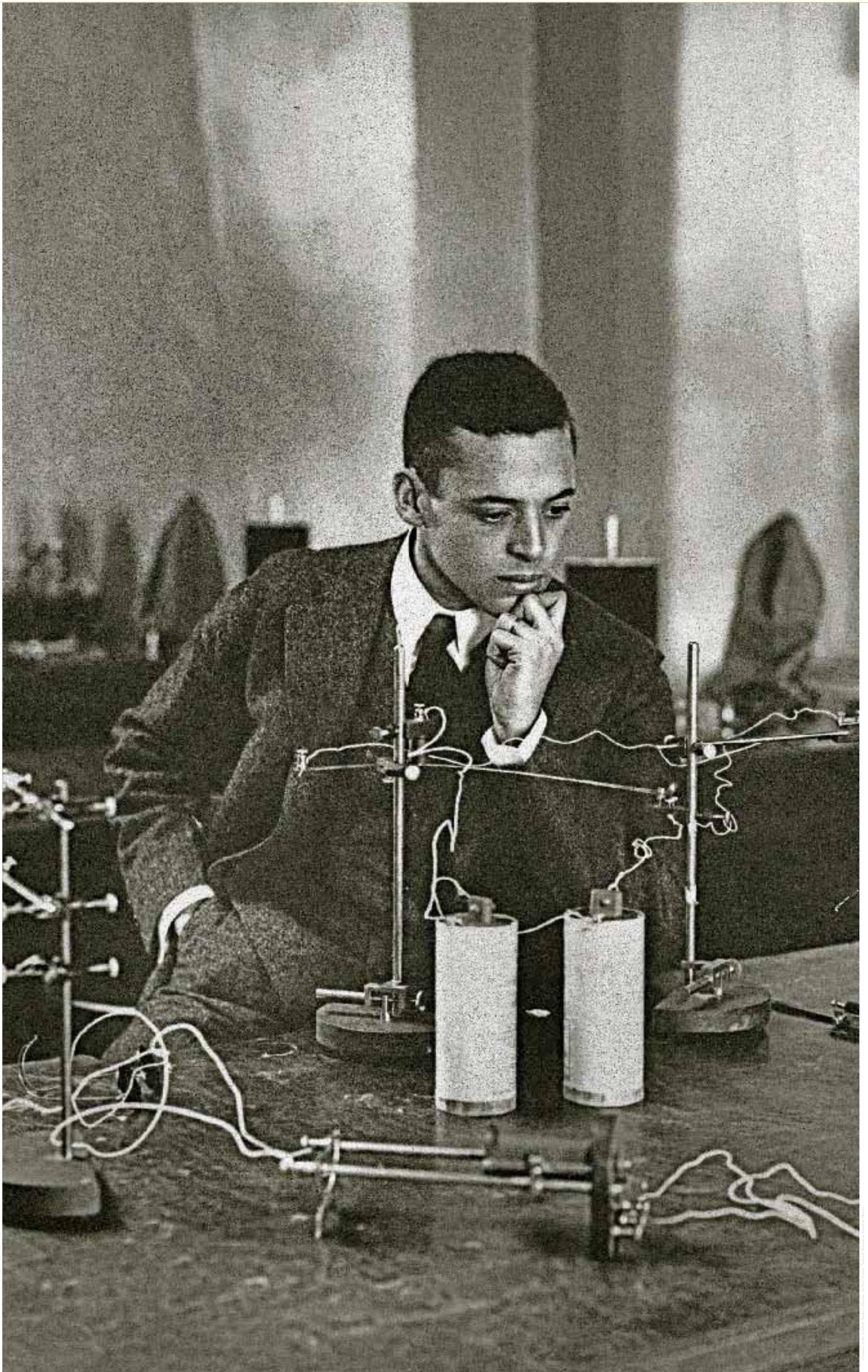
*I cannot urge you too strongly to study and participate in the Washington community...creating a new society where social justice, equality, freedom and brotherhood are real, where democracy is a way of life.*

🌀 MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE 🌀



Founded in 1867, Howard University has long been recognized as the “capstone of black education” in the United States; its products include Nobel Laureates and Supreme Court Justices. Howard retained the Scurlock Studio as its official photographer and was the studio’s largest client at a time when the university rose to national and international prominence. 🌸 For decades the Scurlocks depicted all aspects of life at the university—intellectual, athletic, social, and political. The photographs range from portraits of presidents, deans, and faculty members to group shots of academic departments and social clubs, candid views of classrooms, graduations, and campus landscapes. Scurlock photographs constitute the visual history of Howard in the 20th century. They portray an environment of academic rigor, intellectual enlightenment, and social activism, showcasing one of the nation’s finest institutions of higher learning, and its promise to the black community, the nation and the world.

*Top row, left to right: An undated photo shows Mr. Butcher’s dramatics class at Howard University; Mordecai Johnson, the first African-American president of Howard University, and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, a strong civil rights supporter, talk at an art exhibition, 1938. Bottom row, left to right: Two faculty members are intent on work in the university engineering lab, 1941; An undated photo of female students at the May Festival captures the women who rigorously pursued academic achievement.*

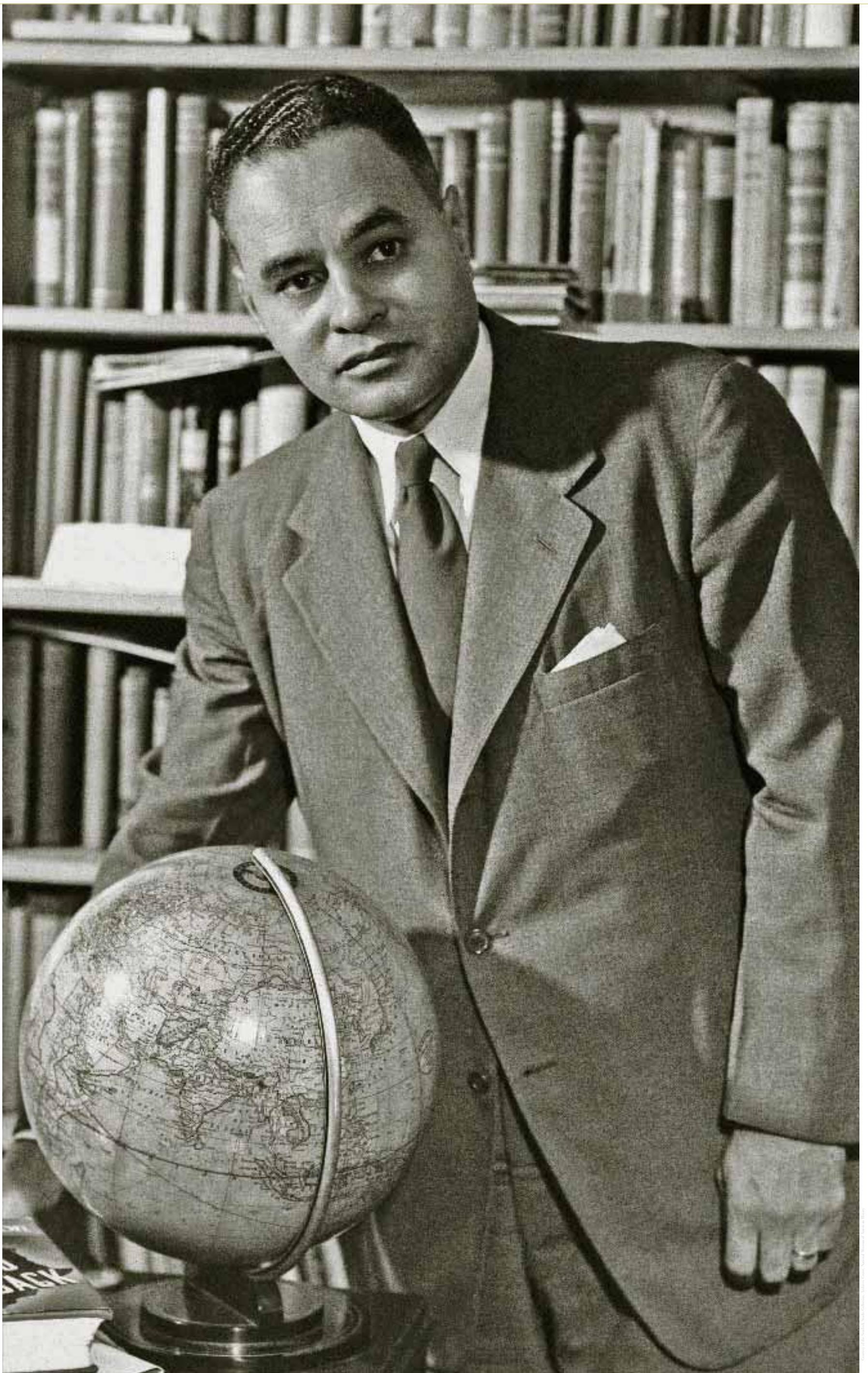


ERNEST EVERETT JUST, GIFTED BIOLOGIST, WAS HEAD OF HOWARD UNIVERSITY'S DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY.

SCURLOCK STUDIO 1916

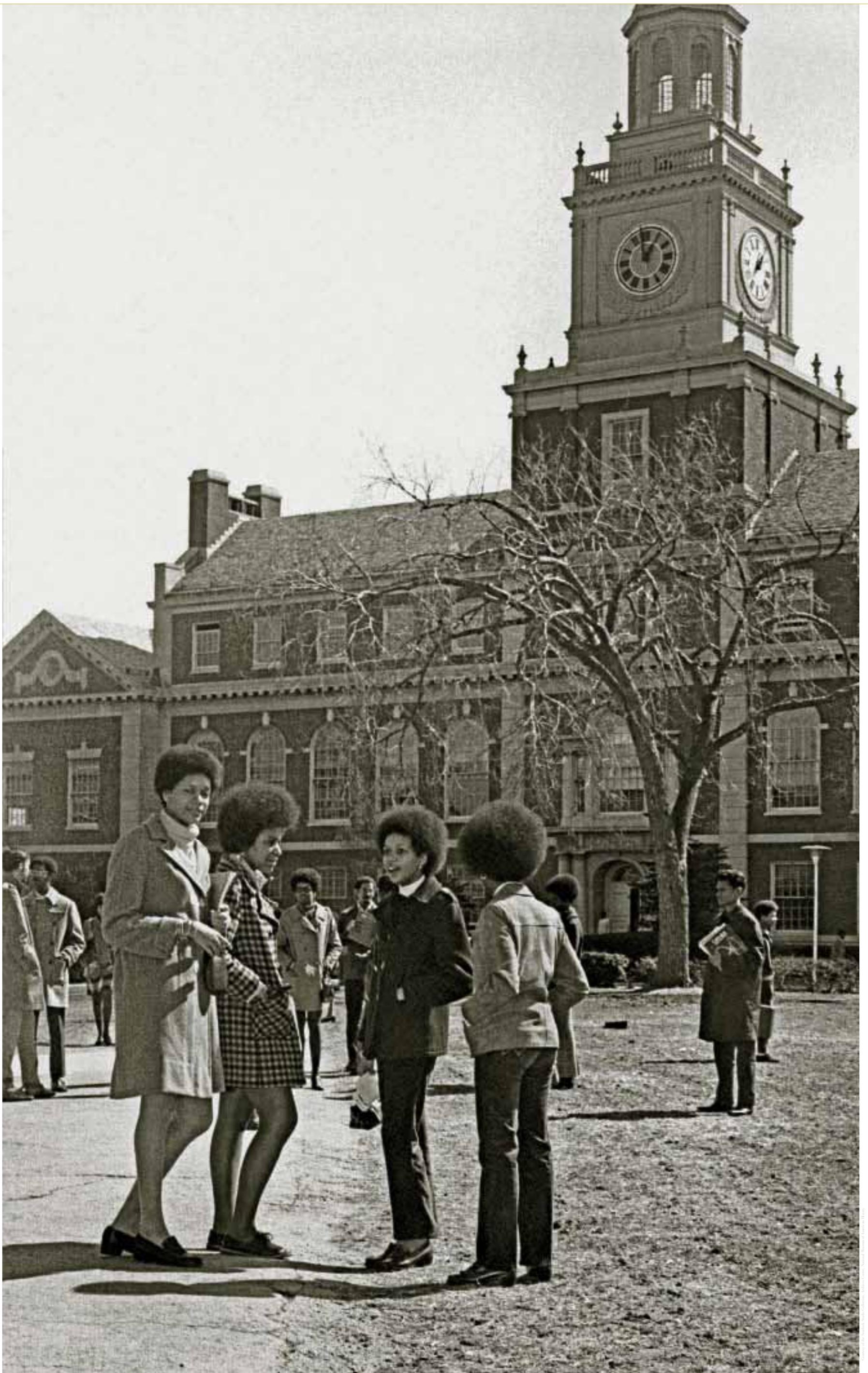


THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY LAW LIBRARY OFFERED STUDENTS A QUIET ATMOSPHERE FOR STUDY.



DIPLOMAT AND ACADEMIC RALPH BUNCHE WON THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE IN 1950.

SCURLOCK STUDIO 1940s



HOWARD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CONGREGATE OUTSIDE FOUNDERS LIBRARY.

SCURLOCK STUDIO 1960s