

The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present

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Ordinary black women, more than any other group in America, have been left out of history. As Darlene Clark Hine points out in her introduction to this powerful and affecting book, "disseminating a visual history is more important with Black women, perhaps, than with any other single segment of the American population. We know all too well what this society believes black women look like. The stereotypes abound, from the Mammy to the maid, from the tragic mulatto to the dark temptress. America's perceptions of Black women are colored by a host of derogatory images and assumptions that proliferated in the aftermath of slavery and, with some permutations, exist even today. We have witnessed the distortion of the image of black women in movies and on television. We have seen black women's faces and bodies shamed and exploited. What we have not seen is the simple truth of their lives. This book will help to eradicate, or at least to dislodge, the many negative and dehumanizing stereotypes and caricatures of Black women that inhabit our consciousness. What do black women look like? What do they look like at work or with their families? What faces do they choose to present to the world, and what faces has the world forced them to acquire? We can look in vain to most pictorial histories of America and even of African America for images of Black women. With noteworthy exceptions, even scholarly studies in Black women's history tend to include few, if any, photographic images. Of the images that previously have been presented in print, the majority have been of famous Black women. The Face of Our Past brings the ordinary Black woman to center stage, showing how she lives, loves her family, works to survive, fights for her people, and expresses her individuality. In addition to 302 carefully chosen images, Kathleen Thompson and Hilary Mac Austin provide quotations from letters, diaries, journals, and other sources

"...[an] innovative and daring work of self-examination.... Neville tutors us in the art of finding meaning in the midst of everyday life." -- Spirituality Health "This is the perfect book for those interested in recognizing the diversity of black American women." -- "... an eloquent rebuttal to the stereotypes and distorted media images that have plagued Black women throughout history." -- Emerge "Here is a comprehensive visual source of black American women. More than 300 photographs and engravings cover hundreds of years. They show dignity through the degradation of slavery, authenticate cultural traditions and validate the inner strength of the subjects." -- USA Today "These photos of mostly ordinary black women make an extraordinary book. Each picture does speak volumes." -- Julian Bond "These historic photographs make it possible for us to see face-to-face the vivid images of black women, known and unknown, from the Civil War to today. They not only illumine the past, they explain the present, and inspire the future." -- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. About the Author Hilary Mac Austin was a contributing writer to The Encyclopedia of Black Women in America. She was also the photo researcher for A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America. Other books where she has served as the primary photo researcher include Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, and the forthcoming Irish American Desk Reference. Kathleen Thompson has been writing about women for twenty-five years. Recently, she co-authored, with Darlene Clark Hine, A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America. She was editor-in-chief of the Encyclopedia of Black Women and was a major contributor to Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia. She is also the author of the feminist classic Against Rape. She lives in Chicago.