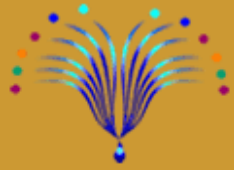


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## Black History Month Showcase...

### *James Terry (and the Willie Harris Collection)*



James Terry is the man responsible for bringing the Willie Harris Collection to the public eye. It is a collection that speaks volumes into the annals of black history.

February is Black History month. A time of year pretty near and dear to our hearts here at L.O.I.R.E. Magazine due to the fact that we are a black owned and operated publication – though we do not consider ourselves to be a “black magazine” or any other race for that matter, but a Faith publication. But, we do celebrate this time of year and to commemorate this black history month, L.O.I.R.E. Magazine decided to showcase a very important figurehead.

Now typically, the subjects of a large amount of the articles for this time of the year are focused on posthumously. But, we at L.O.I.R.E. have decided to showcase someone still living, but someone that has brought to light an important link from the past to the present for a lot of black families in his community. The man we have chosen is James Terry III.

James Terry is a professional photographer that has been at his craft for the past 35 years. He is a Texas native, but has lived in Louisiana since 1957. He started taking pictures in the late sixties and by 1968 the Newsleader newspaper carried his photos every week. He was drafted in 1972 and shipped out to Germany. While there, he studied photography under German masters. He came back and began working for UPI news wire service (once the largest new service in the world). He still works for them 25 years later and photographs the representatives and meetings at the state capital building. Though his own work consists of more than 200,000 pictures taken over the years of dignitaries, politicians, and laypeople, Terry is easily most famous for his overseeing and displaying of the Willie Harris Collection of photographs.

Here’s just a bit of history to the story. Willie Harris was the chief of police at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana from 1940-1985. Prior to this position, Captain Harris had been enlisted in the U.S. Army. While in the military, he was trained in photography. Thusly, after becoming a police officer, he, in his spare time, took photos for any event he could. This was his passion and he delved into it as much as time would let him. His photos, almost all of them of blacks (individuals, groups and organizations) in their respective communities, were very tastefully taken and none of them (which is the preeminence of his work) portrays any negativity whatsoever





among black people. For the times of racial and political unrest in which they were taken, that is very impressive. His photographs also appeared in a number of Louisiana weekly newspapers in the sixties, as well as some national black publications. Willie Harris' subjects have included youths that went on to become huge names: Muhammad Ali and Lynn Whitfield, to name a few.

Willie Harris died in 1992 and when his kids were going to put his house on the market two years later, they went in to clean it up. During the clean-up, Harris' family threw out the photos that their father had been taking during his career. This was how James Terry came to oversee the collection.

Terry was walking his dog, as he and Capt. Harris lived on the same street and happened across the bags of photos that were set out on the curb. There were eight bags of photos containing somewhere around 30,000 black and white eight by ten photos and 20,000 five by seven photos total. He then asked the family if he could have them and they said yes. He then took them to Southern University's library and stored them there until they could get Liberty Bank to underwrite albums and pages for them. Utilizing the hands of the mass communications classes, James Terry was able to arrange the current collection of 40,000 total pictures in 128 albums. The project took two and a half years to complete.



Terry has, over the last decade, managed to get quite a few listing of names to go with the faces in the collection. He says that this was made possible due to the fact that after he began to employ traveling exhibits to churches, libraries and museums, they would ask the viewers to not only look at the pictures, but to also interactively attempt to identify those they might recognize in the photos. And that they did. And still continue to do today. As we said before, quite a few of them have been labeled but there are still a lot more that have yet to be.



James Terry has produced six books on the Willie Harris collection since 1999 that include (in the order they were released): *Our Story*, *Our Glory*; *More Glory*; *Spirit of the People*; *Tribute*; and *Freedom's People*. The sixth book is currently in production. There has also been an LPB production of the 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott that has commissioned, through Terry, the usage of some of the pictures of Captain Willie Harris. James Terry's published books can be purchased in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at The Lighthouse Christian Outlet, The Printing Source, Hosea's Bible and Book Store, and JR's Mail and Copy. You can also email L.O.I.R.E. Magazine to request a copy of any of these books shipped to you via James Terry at [mail@loiremagazine.com](mailto:mail@loiremagazine.com) (subject: WHC request).

We asked James Terry how he felt that the Willie Harris collection made its mark on the grand scheme of black history or how the work of Willie Harris related to the black identity and he told us: "Often times, the activities of Blacks at large are not displayed in national media outlets. Instead, they are showcased more on a local level. Captain Harris spent a great deal of his time photographing black people doing things that they could be proud of (historical events, church events, school events and political, etc). A number of things in



black history were recorded by Willie Harris, but they never received the same popularity that other black history events did. Now by finding the Willie Harris collection, we have the means to write chapters of black history that were missed.” Terry tells us of one such story of history contained in the photos in the account of Horace G. Dawson, Jr. “He [Dawson] was the ambassador of the United States to the African Nation of Botswana under President Jimmy Carter (whom was also a close friend of his prior to his presidency) for over twenty years. He moved back to the United States and now heads the Ralph J. Bunche International Affairs Center at Howard University. He was also a broker in one of the biggest diamond deals in the history of the world. This was a bit of history missed until we got a chance to search the pictures and bring notoriety to the name.”



Terry says, “I want people to know that we all have history in our minds about the people around us. That we have become so comfortable with the people in the positions that they hold that we don’t talk about them. We need to write these things down. We need to record our history so that the next generation will know where we came from and where we have come to. There are a number of people that came first in many categories and if it hadn’t been for them the second, third, etc. couldn’t have come along.†