

That They Lived: African Americans Who Changed the World

Rochelle Riley

Cristi Smith-Jones

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That They Lived pays tribute to Black American icons through black-and-white photographs that recreate their images. It is an elegant collaboration between photographer Cristi Smith-Jones and journalist Rochelle Riley, designed to remind young readers that their role models were once young, too.

Growing out of a Black History Month project that went viral, the collection features photographs of Smith-Jones's daughter Lola and Riley's grandson Caleb posing as people including Muhammad Ali, Shirley Chisholm, W.E.B. DuBois, Barack Obama, Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman. These sharp portraits convey the fun of dress-up, and their costumes and gestures are faithful in detail; similarities to the original photographs result in a vibrant dialogue across time.

Archival photographs of the children's historical counterparts accompany biographical essays that combine their personal details with occasional quotes and career highlights, yielding critical insights into their determination and courage. Multiple of the profiled people were the firsts at crossing color lines in government, sports, and music. The book covers the injustices that people faced, like segregation and barriers to voting, but also their activism.

The book's honest mentions of Jackie Robinson's early gang membership, Aretha Franklin's pregnancy when she was twelve, Martin Luther King Jr.'s suicide attempt, and other stark moments are effective at emphasizing resilience while making it possible for young readers to imagine that positive futures are possible, despite initial setbacks. Such sobering and inspiring facts add up to a motivational album that concludes with uplifting statements about each person's contributions to society.

Bringing influential Black American names from across disciplines down to earth, *That They Lived* is an educational, appealing photographic work that skillfully juxtaposes the past with the present.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2021)

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