



Moneta J. Sleet, Jr. (1926 - 1996)

In 1969, Moneta J. Sleet, Jr. became the first black American to win a Pulitzer Prize in photography. His major contribution to photo-journalism was his extensive documentation of the Civil Rights Movement.

Born in Owensboro, Kentucky, Moneta Sleet's interest in photography began as a child. He pursued photography at Kentucky State College and received his master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1950. He later joined Ebony Magazine as staff photographer. In 1956, Moneta Sleet met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., just as he was emerging as the leader of the civil rights movement. He later covered Dr. King's acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965. When Dr. King was assassinated in 1968, Moneta Sleet covered the funeral, resulting in the Pulitzer winning photograph of Dr. King's grieving widow Coretta and youngest daughter Bernice.

His early career covered the period of African national independence in the 1950's. Sleet photographed in Liberia, Libya, Sudan and he photographed Kwame Nkrumah at moment of Ghana's independence. This gained Moneta Sleet an Overseas Press Club Citation in 1957. He often photographed children who tagged alongside him as he worked. The father of three children himself, these portraits were the most rewarding.