

The Harlem Book of the Dead

 airmail.news/issues/2025-11-1/the-harlem-book-of-the-dead

Maggie Turner

November 1, 2025

[Best](#)

Black funerals in [New York City](#) were once a celebration, welcoming the deceased into an afterlife of peace after a lifetime of struggle. The practice is revived in the re-release of ***The Harlem Book of the Dead***, originally published in 1978. The book comprises over three dozen portraits by photographer **James Van Der Zee**—a renowned figure of the **Harlem Renaissance** known for depicting Black middle-class life—that offer a visual chronology of the tradition, complete with biblical and mythical adornments. With a foreword by **Toni Morrison**, the book immortalizes a forgotten cultural touchstone and is a perfect read for this haunted weekend. (\$24, primaryinformation.org) —