

The Loewentheil Collection of African American Photographs: Cornell University

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Cornell University in Ithaca, New York house an online collection titled the Loewentheil Collection of African American Photographs, donated to the university by Stephan and Beth Loewentheil in 2012. The collection includes 645 images, spanning the years from 1860 to the 1960s. Included are photographs of some famous African Americans including Dr. Martin Luther Jr. and Muhammad Ali. But most of the photographs are images of everyday life in the African American community. The collection can be searched by date, geographic location, photographer, and subject matter. Among the earliest images in the collection is the photograph below showing a group of young enslaved African Americans on a plantation in Louisiana.

Hundreds of seldom-seen photographs documenting the journey of African-Americans from the slavery era to the 20th century are now digitized and freely accessible to students and scholars around the world. Hence, the collection presents unnamed poignant photographs of proud women and men who worked hard to support their families during slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement. The photographs also include tintypes of the formerly enslaved and personal family photo albums, dating from the 1850s to the mid-20th century. They encompass daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, carte-de-visite photographs, albumen prints, Polaroids and more.



The majority of images in the Loewentheil Collection of African-American Photographs (RMM08043) are believed to be in the public domain in the United States by virtue of their creation date (pre-1923). The copyright status and copyright owners of the remaining images in the Loewentheil Collection of African-American Photographs (RMM08043) are unknown. This collection was digitized by Cornell University Library in 2016 from a photographic print collection, with funding from an Arts and Sciences Grant to Katherine Reagan and Cheryl Finley. Descriptions and titles are from the physical collection, and will be updated incrementally. Whenever possible, information on current rights owners is included with the image. Cornell is providing access to the materials as a digital aggregate under an assertion of fair use for non-commercial educational use. The written permission of any copyright and other rights holders is required for distribution, reproduction, or other use that extends beyond what is authorized by fair use and other statutory exemptions. Responsibility for making an independent legal assessment of an item and securing any necessary permissions ultimately rests with persons desiring to use the item. Cornell would like to learn more about items in the collection and to hear from individuals or institutions that have any additional information as to rights holders.

The collection includes some historical images that reveal racist, disturbing, or otherwise negative representations or stereotypes of the people depicted. These images have been included as part of the historical record and should not be interpreted to mean that Cornell University or its staff endorse or approve of the negative representations or stereotypes presented.



