Participants for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Photographic Preservation Project Selected

In partnership with The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, The HBCU Library Alliance, The Image Permanence Institute at the Rochester Institute of Technology, The University of Delaware Art Conservation Department, LYRASIS is sponsoring the HBCU Photographic Preservation Project. This project is Round 2 of an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded initiative aimed at improving the preservation of significant photographic collections held by HBCUs. Based on the significance and usage of the proposed collections, the conditions of the collections, and the capacity of the institution to support a project, the following 10 institutions were selected to receive grants for preservation projects:

- Atlanta University Center - Robert W. Woodruff Library (GA), Bethune-Cookman University (FL), Bowie State University (MD), Fisk University (TN), H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College (AL), Hampton University (VA), Jackson State University (MS), Johnson C. Smith University (NC), Oakwood University (AL), and Tuskegee University (AL).

Following a survey of 91 HBCU institutions, 35 were invited to apply to be one of the 10 participants in the one-year demonstration projects. Work on these projects will begin in April 2012. Each of the participants will receive grants of up to $45,000 to support:

- Re-housing of selected negative or print collections;
- Stabilization and treatment of at-risk photographic materials;
- Purchasing supplies needed for conservation or preservation projects;
- Purchasing duplication or conservation services;
- Consultants to provide collection assessment or additional technical training;
- Salary support for workers to assist with implementation of projects; and
- In-depth assessment of the condition and storage needs of the photographic collections.

An environmental control and monitoring program will ensure the long-term health of the collections. Each institution will receive equipment that monitors the climate in areas where collections are held. The data will be monitored for one year, and staff will receive training to interpret the information collected and recommendations for system adjustments to address problems and maintain a stable environment.

To facilitate learning and maximize resources, each institution will employ up to two students for an eight-week student internship. These students will receive hands-on training and experience. The internships will include participation in a six-day Photograph Preservation Institute at the University of Delaware. Internships will also introduce students to potential careers in conservation and archives.

The variety of collections represented in this project demonstrates the wide impact of these preservation activities. Treatment of the items, training of staff, and environmental control will ensure that future generations have access to these essential photographs. Here are a few highlights of the collections to be addressed:

The Bethune-Cookman University will preserve the photograph collection of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, who was the founder of the National Council of Negro Women, was appointed as Director of the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration, and served as an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Dr. Bethune’s life is of great interest to scholars nationally and internationally. This collection contains approximately 1,900 photographs.
The Hampton University Museum and Archives’ Native American Collection documents the testing of a system to educate and assimilate the native population from 1878-1923. This successful test was used by Hampton University to demonstrate the value of education and the peaceful coexistence of different races. This unique collection contains over 50,000 items related to this part of our national history.

H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College maintains a collection that documents major events in the Civil Rights Movement. Photographs recording the Montgomery Bus Boycott Movement, the Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights March, and the March on Washington will be preserved in this project. These items have been resources to scholars internationally. The content of these collections is significant in the development of our national identity. “H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College library recognizes the importance of preserving the past. The photographs in the archives are highly significant since much of this type of material is absent from institutional collections in Alabama. We believe that these photographic collections document the visual and historic legacy of people and events involved in the Civil and Voting Rights Movements in Montgomery,” said Paul Blackmon, Head Librarian at Trenholm State.

The photograph collection at Jackson State University documents an incident where twelve students were injured and two were killed when the Mississippi National Guard, the Mississippi Highway Patrol, and the Jackson Police Department opened fire on a women’s dormitory during a protest. This event was overshadowed by the shootings at Kent State University ten days earlier.

The stewards of these collections have long recognized the vital importance of preserving these items. “Our collection highlights the lives of many Black Charlotteans, historically Black neighborhoods, and photographs of the civil rights movement in Charlotte during the 1960s, including the protests and sit-ins. With this project, we can preserve and make accessible this collection that spans over thirty years,” stated Monika Rhue, Director of Library Services, Johnson C. Smith University.

“The Grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supports the care and accessibility of collections of national importance. We are pleased to be involved in this worthy effort,” stated Kate Nevins, Executive Director, LYRASIS.

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