



Unidentified Photographer
(Unidentified Man on a Motorcycle), ca. 1936
Gelatin silver print
Collection of the International Center of Photography

African American Vernacular Photography: Selections from the Daniel Cowin Collection

On view from
December 9, 2005
through February 26, 2006

Media Preview
December 8, 2005
9:30 - 11am

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Little is known about the private lives of African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as their social transactions for the most part took place away from the camera's lens. *African American Vernacular Photography: Selections from the Daniel Cowin Collection*, on view at the International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) from December 9, 2005 – February 26, 2006, presents the first major exhibition of rarely seen informal or vernacular views of everyday African American life from 1860 to 1940, as depicted in a variety of photographic genres.

The images in *African American Vernacular Photography* attest to the innate ability of photography both to record personal lives and to create substantial and lasting documents of social history. The exhibition includes about 70 photographs—formal studio portraits, casual snapshots, pictures of children, images of uniformed soldiers, wedding portraits, and “Southern-views” made for tourist consumption—all drawn from the collection of nearly 1,500 images donated to the International Center of Photography by former trustee Daniel Cowin in 1992. Among the photographers represented in the exhibition are James VanDerZee, Cornelius M. Battey, and Frances Benjamin Johnston. Most of the photographers, however, are little known or not known at all. While some of the sitters were celebrities of the day, the majority were unnamed Americans posing for their portrait, getting their hair done, playing baseball, attending school, or working. Many of the

photographs respond to earlier stereotypical or derogatory depictions of African Americans by portraying ordinary folks going about their business with quiet dignity.

African American Vernacular Photography: Selections from the Daniel Cowin Collection was organized by ICP Chief Curator Brian Wallis. The exhibition is accompanied by a publication of the same name, which will reproduce ninety-two works from the collection, and will include essays by Mr. Wallis and Deborah Willis, Professor of Photography and Imaging at New York University, as well as an annotated checklist.

Other exhibitions on view:

The Body at Risk: Photography of Disorder, Illness, and Healing

Che! Revolution and Commerce

Ken Light: Coal Hollow

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