

## Jazz-Era Photos Enter Public Domain

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Earlier this year, a major collection of jazz photos housed at the Library of Congress entered the public domain. The William P. Gottlieb Collection contains pictures Gottlieb took of celebrated artists in the 1930s and 1940s, including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Charlie Parker.

The Library acquired the collection in 1995 with support from the Ira and Leonore S. Gershwin Fund. Under the purchase agreement, Gottlieb retained copyright to the collection initially but transferred it to the public domain effective February 16, 2010—an unusual move, according to Bernard Reilly, former head of the curatorial section of the Prints and Photographs Division. “It’s more the rule than the exception that photographers and their estates tend to maintain copyright restrictions,” he told the *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* in 1995. “The fact that [Gottlieb] decided to give [the collection] to us is very generous. He has given something that is very important to the research community.”

Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1917, Gottlieb became interested in jazz as a student at Lehigh University, writing jazz reviews for campus publications. In 1938, in his final year of college, he secured a position in the advertising department of the *Washington Post*. Soon afterward, he volunteered to write a weekly jazz column for the newspaper’s Sunday edition.

At first, a photographer accompanied him to local nightclubs and theaters. When the *Post* decided that it could not afford the photographer, Gottlieb bought a press camera and mastered it, becoming known in Washington as “Mr. Jazz” by



*Jam session at the Howard Theater, Washington, D.C., c. 1941. From left, drummer Ray Bauduc of the Bob Crosby orchestra; tenor saxophonist Herschel Evans of the Count Basie band; double bassist Bob Haggart of the Crosby orchestra; tenor saxophonist Eddie Miller of the Crosby orchestra; tenor saxophonist Lester Young of the Basie band; and clarinetist Matty Matlock of the Crosby orchestra.*

age 22. Besides his *Post* job, he hosted two local radio shows about jazz.

Gottlieb told interviewers in the 1990s that a highlight of his time in Washington was a jam session he organized and photographed at the Howard Theater between two otherwise racially segregated groups, Bob Crosby’s Dixieland swing orchestra and Count Basie’s big band.

After serving in World War II, Gottlieb moved to New York to work for *Down Beat*, the leading U.S. jazz magazine. There he continued to write reviews and take notable photographs, including a 1947 picture of singer Billie Holiday, cited as the most widely reproduced image in jazz history.

Married and with a family, Gottlieb decided in 1948 to give up late nights in smoky clubs for a second career as a writer of children’s books and filmstrips. He died in 2006 at age 89.

To view Gottlieb’s photographs online and read more about his career, go to <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wghtml/wghome.html>. ©