

Karla Y. Davis

African American cultural collections and museums

Archiving and preserving Black history

African American bibliophiles were perhaps the first individuals to begin collecting materials related to black culture. Perhaps these individuals were interested in cataloging the achievements of their people, which were not often highlighted in the majority press or in their classrooms.

As Sinette notes, "These pioneer black collectors existed in a society that not only denied their humanity but seemed skeptical about their ability to achieve."¹

Later, African American cultural collections moved to historically Black colleges and universities or to urban areas with large African American populations. Today, these collections are found throughout the country in libraries, museums, and other venues.

This article profiles African American collections held at libraries, both public and academic, museums, and cultural organizations dedicated to preserving Black history.

Public libraries

African-American Research Library and Cultural Center. Located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, this center serves scholars, students, and the general public. It contains more than 75,000 books, documents, artifacts, and related materials that focus on the experiences of people of African descent. *Access:* <http://www.broward.org/library/aarlcc.htm>.

African American Special Collection. This collection invites users to

learn about the contributions of African Americans in Las Vegas. The Web site gives brief overviews of the special collections housed in this branch of the library. *Access:* <http://www.lvcld.org/library/special/afam/about.html>.

Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library. The mission of the library is to serve as an educational and cultural resource for the people of Denver, and the world, focusing on the history, literature, art, music, religion, and politics of African Americans in Colorado and throughout the Rocky Mountain West. *Access:* <http://aarl.denverlibrary.org>.

E. Azalia Hackley Collection of Negro Music, Dance and Drama. The Hackley Collection resides in the main branch of the Detroit Public Library. The Web site details the types of materials available in the collection and methods for use. *Access:* http://www.detroit.lib.mi.us/hackley/hackley_index.htm.

Icabod Flewellen Collection. The East Cleveland Public Library has acquired this collection of printed materials, photographs, and videotapes. A finding aid and instructions for using the collection are available. *Access:* http://ecpl.lib.oh.us/Flewellen%20Files/Icabod_flewellenhomepage.htm.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Widely considered the

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premier collection of African American materials in this country, the Schomburg Center's Web site details its collections, on-line exhibits, and upcoming events. *Access:* <http://www.nypl.org/research/sc/sc.html>.

The Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature. The Harsh Collection is the largest African American history and literature collection in the Midwest. The collection's strength is concentrated in African American history in Illinois. The site has a few finding aids, a collection of images, and a list of its microfilm holdings. *Access:* <http://www.chipublib.org/002branches/woodson/wнварsh.html>.

Universities

African American Collection. The African American Collection supports the Africana Studies Department in its study, research, interpretation, and the dissemination of knowledge concerning African American, African, and Caribbean affairs and culture. The library houses material on the African Americans, Africans, and Caribbean cultures in the following disciplines: Arts, Education, History, Literature, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, Sociology, Sports, and Religion. *Access:* <http://www.library.pitt.edu/libraries/african-american/african-american.html>.

African American Collections at University of California Berkeley. This Web site lists a brief description of Berkeley's African American Collections. A bibliography for the microfilm holdings is available. *Access:* http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/doemoff/afr_amer/collection.html.

African American Collections at University of California Santa Barbara Library. The African American collections at the University of California-Santa Barbara are part of the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives. The Web site provides for diverse collections, such as the Bay Area Black Panthers Collection and the Blacks in Film and Television Collec-

tion. *Access:* <http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/listguides.html#african>.

Afro-American Studies Collection. More than 100,000 volumes are contained in this collection. The holdings are scattered throughout many libraries. The collection development policy is online and lists the collection's strengths and weaknesses. *Access:* http://www.library.uiuc.edu/administration/collections/collections/descriptions/afroamer_studies.htm.

Amistad Research Center. Amistad Research Center boasts a beautifully decorated Web site with information on its recent acquisitions, current holdings, and status since Hurricane Katrina. The center's photograph collection dates back to 1859, and it has quite an extensive collection of African and African American art. *Access:* <http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/>.

Black Cultural Center Library. Purdue University's only campus library that specializes in materials related to the historical and cultural aspects of the lives of African American people. The history of the library and its past programs are highlighted on the site. *Access:* <http://www.purdue.edu/bcc/library>.

Black Film Center/Archive. The Black Film Center/Archive was established more than 20 years ago and serves as a repository of films and related materials by and about African Americans. The Web site contains a great deal of helpful information about the collection, including booking information for their traveling exhibit of film posters. *Access:* <http://www.indiana.edu/~bfca>.

Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection. This collection of more than 30,000 items has materials on the global black experience in all formats: books, manuscripts, sheet music, pamphlets, journals, newspapers, broadsides, posters, photographs, and rare ephemera. The collection's rare books section is particularly strong in its first editions. *Access:* <http://library.temple.edu/collections/blockson/index.jsp?bhcp=1>.

Fisk University Library Special Collections. The Special Collections housed in the Fisk University Library consist mainly of primary and secondary materials on African-American themes. A limited number of finding aids are available and, at the writing of this article, the Web site was only accessible by using Internet Explorer. *Access:* <http://www.sk.edu/page.asp?id=513>.

John Henrik Clarke Africana Library. The holdings of the Africana Library number close to 20,000 and support the curriculum of study of Cornell's Africana Studies department. The Web site details the history of the library and information about its namesake. *Access:* <http://www.library.cornell.edu/africana/>.

John Hope Franklin Collection of African and African-American Documentation. Named for the famous historian, this collection is especially strong regarding 19th-century slavery and African American life in the post-World War II civil rights era. The comprehensive Web site offers information on the collection and news and events. *Access:* <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/franklin/>.

Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center. The center is a cultural preservation research resource that houses significant records like the papers of the late author Margaret Walker Alexander. While no inventory of Alexander's paper is visible on the Web site, photos of the center and some of its contents are available. *Access:* <http://www.jsums.edu/maw.htm>.

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center is consistently recognized as one of the most comprehensive institutions documenting the history and culture of people of African descent in Africa, the Americas, and other parts of the world. The center's history and the different components of its holdings are outlined on the Web site. *Access:* <http://www.founders.howard.edu/moorland-spingarn/default.htm>.

Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History. The Stone

Center Library contains a circulating collection of materials dealing with the African American experience, Africa, and the African Diaspora. The Web site includes a comprehensive guide to African American resources on the Web. *Access:* <http://www.lib.unc.edu/stone/>.

Xavier Archives. Xavier University's Archives concentrates on four areas: the history of Xavier University of Louisiana, African-American history and culture, Roman Catholicism in the United States, and the Southern United States and the Gulf-Caribbean region, with special emphasis on the history of Louisiana and New Orleans. The Web site contains information about current unpublished collections, but no finding aids are listed online. *Access:* <http://www.xula.edu/library/archives>.

Museums

African-American Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa. The history of African Americans in Iowa is documented at this museum. The easy-to-navigate Web site profiles the mission of the museum and offers glimpses at current and future exhibits. Finding guides are also available online. *Access:* <http://www.blackiowa.org>.

Anacostia Community Museum. The museum explores American history, society, and creative expression from an African American perspective. Visitors to the Web site can explore the online diary of an early Washington, D.C.-area family and view online exhibits. *Access:* <http://anacostia.si.edu/>.

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. This museum is dedicated to the civil rights movement in Birmingham and beyond. The Web site allows visitors to view a collection guide and e-mail an archivist with research questions. *Access:* <http://www.bcri.org>.

Black American West Museum. The museum documents the history of black residents of the West. It is notable for owning several lots in Dearfield, a former African American settlement. The Web site links to events, donation opportunities, and links

to other resources. *Access:* <http://www.blackamericanwestmuseum.com>.

Black Archives of Mid-America.

The Black Archives of Mid-America serves as a depository of artifacts documenting the African American experience in the four-state area of Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, and Oklahoma. The Web site details moments in Kansas City history, featured articles, recent additions, and most popular collection items. *Access:* <http://www.blackarchives.org>.

Idaho Black History Museum.

The history of African Americans in Idaho is preserved at the Idaho Black History Museum. While the museum may have limited hours, the Web site maintains information about the permanent exhibit and upcoming events. *Access:* <http://www.ibhm.org>.

Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History and Conference Center. This museum is located in the former home of Lucy Craft Laney, a prominent educator in Georgia. The Web site contains information about current exhibits, permanent exhibitions, and photos of the garden on the grounds. *Access:* <http://www.lucycraftlaneymuseum.com>.

Cultural organizations

Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society. This group strives to support scholarship and serve as a networking resource for those interested in African American genealogical research. The Web site contains an index to back issues of the journal it publishes, information about its annual conference, and contact information for local chapters. *Access:* <http://www.aahgs.org>.

Association of African-American Museums. This organization serves as a resource for museums and professionals who work in settings dedicated to preserving African American history. The association sponsors an annual conference. Its Web site provides information on grant opportunities, links to member museums, and exhibitions available for loan. *Access:* <http://www.blackmuseums.org>.

Association for Black Culture Centers. Headquartered at North Carolina State

University, this organization offers resources to those involved with black and multicultural centers. *Access:* <http://provost.ncsu.edu/oldsite/oces/diversity/abcc/>.

Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Carter G. Woodson, founder of what is now known as Black History Month, created this organization. Its mission is to promote, research, preserve, interpret, and disseminate information about Black life, history, and culture to the global community. *Access:* <http://www.asalh.org>.

Black Heritage Society of Washington State. The Black Heritage Society of Washington State is dedicated to preserving and exhibiting the history of African Americans in Washington. Excerpts from oral histories are sprinkled throughout the Web site's home page, drawing the visitor into group's mission. *Access:* <http://www.blackheritagewa.org>.

Black Loyalist Heritage Society. The Black Loyalist Heritage Society is committed to discovering, interpreting, safeguarding, and promoting the history and heritage of the Black Loyalists. *Access:* <http://www.blackloyalist.com>.

British Columbia Black History Awareness Society. This organization aims to highlight the contributions that those of African descent have made to British Columbia and Canada. *Access:* <http://www.islandnet.com/~bcbhas/>.

National Council for Black Studies. For more than 30 years, the National Council for Black Studies has worked to promote the development of Black and African Studies as a respected academic discipline. The extensive Web site provides plenty of resources from funding opportunities to position announcements. *Access:* <http://www.ncbsonline.org/home>.

Note

1. Elinor Des Verney Sinette, Arthur Alfonso Schomburg (1874-1938), Black Bibliophile and Collector, *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1990). ¶