

## African American Research Library and Cultural Center Special Collections Preservation Project

**What activity (or activities) would the grant support?**

The African American Research Library and Cultural Center (AARLCC) is seeking support for the development of a two stage preservation and outreach initiative. The first output area will employ an external consultant to create a comprehensive preservation assessment report. The purpose of this assessment is to provide a thorough actionable report of archival planning needs. The scope of the assessment will cover the collections and their institutional context - the physical building, storage environment, security, access, care, conservation repair, and exhibition. Collections at AARLCC are found in the following mediums: paper, photographic, book, art, framed art, manuscript and oversized materials. Besides identifying a hierarchy of preservation needs, the report will serve as documentation for further institutional budgeting.

The second output will be the completion of two preservation and collections care workshops for the general public. AARLCC is located in one of the oldest historically black communities in Broward County, Florida. Located on Sistrunk Blvd, named for one of Broward County's first black physicians, AARLCC opened in 2002, and has served as the repository of materials related to the local, national and international voices of the African diaspora. With time, and as the surrounding neighborhoods undergo a change in population, the risk of losing valuable information is evident. The average person is unaware that their personal papers have historical value. Often, records of a community's history are lost or discarded. Of great importance is the need to collect and preserve the history of this and other historically Black communities in Broward. Though open to all members of the community, the proposed workshop seeks to capture their underrepresented narratives. The workshop will teach attendees how to preserve their personal records. During the workshop, an emphasis will be placed on positioning AARLCC's Special Collections and Archives as a resource for the community. Attendees will also be instructed on the process and value of making preparations to donate their materials to a repository such as AARLCC.

**What are the content and size of the humanities collections that are the focus of the project?**

AARLCC's Special Collections and Archives represent a diverse spectrum of the African diaspora and encompass a unique range of potential research areas. AARLCC's collections include manuscripts, masks, framed art, print, photography and audiovisuals.

**Manuscripts** - Nationally notable manuscript collections include the Alex Haley Papers and the Esther Rolle Papers. Spanning from the 1960s to the 1990s, the Alex Haley Papers, 1960-1992 include print materials related to the production of the groundbreaking 1977 miniseries *ROOTS*. The televised miniseries helped to begin a watershed moment for interest in African-American genealogy and legacy. The collection includes unfinished manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, memorabilia and business documents. A signed copy of Alex Haley's book *ROOTS* is also available in the rare book collection. Correspondence from Maya Angelou, Tony Morrison and Louis Gossett Jr. are standouts in the manuscript collection (70 boxes).

Another notable national and locally recognized collection is the Esther Rolle Papers, 1962-1999. Esther Rolle is known for her theatre and television roles, notably the television series *Good Times*, however she has roots in Broward County. Rolle was born in Pompano Beach (a municipality in Broward) to Bahamian immigrant parents. Posthumously, her family donated her personal belonging to AARLCC when it opened in 2002. The collection includes her Emmy Award for the miniseries *Summer of my*

## African American Research Library and Cultural Center Special Collections Preservation Project

*German Soldier*, various awards from her civic engagements, photographs, a painting of her likeness, her dress and personal items. Notable photographs include Esther Rolle with Morgan Freeman in *Driving Miss Daisy*, the cast of *Good Times* and Molly Ringwald in *P.K. and the Kid*. (25 boxes)

Consisting of 250 archival boxes, the Maurice Dawkins Papers, 1960-2001, include newspaper clippings, business files, and documents related to his career as a politician and activist. Dawkins is credited with helping organize the 1963 March on Washington, he was a former president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), he formed the Broward County location of the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) and was also a reverend. In his political career, in 1988, he ran for the Virginia Senate as the Republican candidate against former Governor Charles S. Robb.

Local Broward County pioneers in the Black community are represented in the manuscript collections as well. This includes the Margaret and Cato Roach Papers, 1949-1997 as well as the Ethel Mizell Pappy Family Papers, 1941-2005. Margaret and Cato Roach were prominent educators and activists. Margaret is credited with founding the Broward County chapter of the Urban League. Cato Roach taught math and science at Dillard High School, the only high school available to black students when Broward County was segregated. Ethel Mizell Pappy belonged to the prominent Mizell family of Dania Beach, FL. Her brother Von D. Mizell was one of Broward County's first black surgeons. Dr. Mizell worked at Provident Hospital, which was established in 1938 to care for black residents of Broward County. The Ethel Mizell Pappy Family Papers contain documents relating to Provident Hospital as well as Dr. Mizell's lawsuit to integrate other local hospitals in the 1970s.

**Artifacts and Ephemera** - Artifacts of historical significance include a Slave Bill of Sale for two girls from 1845; a 1963 identification work pass of Henry James McNair that allowed him to travel to work at the Lago Mar Hotel in Fort Lauderdale, FL and the tintype of a black soldier during the Civil War. AARLCC has a significant collection of framed art, carved masks and sculptures of various mediums. Framed art includes the original work of Charles Mills and Jonathan Green. The art depicts both the everyday life of mostly Africans, African-Americans, Caribbeans, as well as famous subjects including Thurgood Marshall and Zora Neale Hurston. Carved masks and sculptures include djembe (drums), West and East African wood, metal, gourd, beads and shells from regions such as the Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria. Several of them symbolize fertilization, bountiful harvests and prosperity.

**Print** - Print materials in the collection consist of books, photography and periodicals. Book collections include Dorothy Porter Wesley, 1852-1995, the first African-American to graduate from Columbia University's school of library science. Her collection of books focus on Afro-Brazilian cultural studies. The Niara Sudarkasa, 1934-2006, book collection, named after the first female president of Lincoln University, consists of books about Nigerian, Ghanaian and American Civil Rights history. The general rare book collection contains more than 20,000 books with subjects from history, linguistics, sociology and poetry. More than 2,000 photographs and slides make-up the Clinton Mack (300 photographic prints) and Slides of the Sistrunk Corridor (1,000 slides) collections. Both are visual representations of Pompano Beach and Fort Lauderdale from the 1930s through 1970s. Periodicals include pamphlets, newspapers, archival copies of the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, and *Crisis*, the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

## African American Research Library and Cultural Center Special Collections Preservation Project

**Audiovisual** - Audiovisual materials in the collection consist of oral history recordings, vinyl music records, optical media (compact disc, digital versatile disc, MiniDisc), microfilm, magnetic audio and video tape. The Kitty Oliver Oral Histories, recorded originally on magnetic audio tape, was part of the Race and Change Project by Dr. Kitty Oliver. The 22 boxes of tapes and transcripts of oral histories capture the history of the varying ethnicities that lived in the historically Black neighborhoods of Broward County. The oral histories were conducted from 2000 to 2007 and include narration from Boca Raton in Palm Beach County as well as women from Ghana. Notable microfilm/microfiche collections include the FBI Files on Martin Luther King, Jr., State Slave Statutes for every southern state, the Papers of W.E.B. DuBois and the FBI File on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

### **How are these humanities collections used?**

In the past, AARLCC's Special Collections and Archives have been used in a variety of engaging exhibits to promote programming, commemorate national events, and educational aids during tours and as research material. As a public library in a major metropolitan city, AARLCC has a diverse audience. Visitors include adults, children, school tours, universities, scholars, non-profit organizations and politicians from across the nation. As a bedrock in the local community, and the only library of its kind in the state, AARLCC has hosted high profile visitors. For instance, Hillary Clinton visited the library during her 2016 presidential run. During the 2018 election, an MSNBC news anchor broadcast her morning show live from the library premises to document Andrew Gillum's run as the first black nominee for Florida Governor. AARLCC also receives countless media inquiries and requests to reproduce or loan our unique collections for local exhibits. In 2010, through a collaborative project with University of Miami Libraries, AARLCC partnered with Florida International University, Florida Memorial University, the Black Archives History and Research Center (Miami), Historic Hampton House Community Trust, HistoryMiami and the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust to form the Collaborative Archive from the African Diaspora (CAAD). CAAD provides open access to the online collections finding aids for the institutions in the collaborative. AARLCC has also made strides to be recognized as a cutting edge resource for the digital humanities. In 2017, to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the grand opening of the library, AARLCC was awarded a grant by the Institute of Museum and Library Services to develop and install a virtual reality exhibit on the Harlem Renaissance. The innovative exhibit is based on Virtual Harlem, a project developed by Dr. Bryan Carter, Associate Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Arizona. Through the virtual reality experience, users are able to "walk" through a recreation of the famed Harlem, NY during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. The exhibit is currently touring to five additional African-American museum galleries across the state of Florida throughout 2019. For genealogical research, the Special Collections reading room hosts researchers who are interested in the Kitty Oliver Oral histories for the Race and Change project. The narratives of those interviewed, sheds light on the history of the historically Black neighborhoods in Broward County. Several of these communities no longer exist due to commercialization. Therefore the recordings serve as a peek into the unwritten history of the community.

### **What is the nature and mission of your institution?**

**Foundation** - The mission of AARLCC's Special Collections and Archives is to collect, preserve and provide access to research materials focusing on the history and culture of people of African, African-American and Caribbean descent. This is accomplished by bridging three major focus areas: community

## African American Research Library and Cultural Center Special Collections Preservation Project

engagement, education and access, through a variety of outreach programs geared toward youth and adults. Workshops, exhibits, tours and research assistance are at the forefront of our mission to provide timely access to print and digital resources.

**Structure** - AARLCC opened in 2002 as the third public library of its kind in the nation behind the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York) and the Auburn Avenue Research Library (Georgia). The 60,000 square foot library is a branch of the Broward County Library system in Broward County, Florida. AARLCC has an exhibit gallery, 300 seat auditorium, two seminar rooms and a meeting room. The Special Collections and Archives storage vault has more than 30,000 cubic feet of archival storage. The two story building maintains a dual purpose by having meeting spaces (cultural center) on the first floor and public services (library and research center) on the second floor. The library, located in the oldest historically black neighborhood, is situated within the Reverend Samuel Delevoe Memorial Park complex maintained by Broward County Parks and Recreation. It also shares the campus with the Broward County Urban League, which has fostered significant collaboration with the civic organization.

**Operation** - AARLCC is open seven days a week. Excluding the ten federally recognized holidays, the library is open approximately 355 days during the year. The library's hours are 12pm to 8pm Mondays/Wednesdays and 10am to 6pm Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The Special Collections and Archives reading room is open during the regular operating hours of the library, except Sunday. The research room is open by appointment, though walk-ins are accepted.

**Capacity** - AARLCC Special Collections and Archives has two full-time staff (Archivist and Librarian) and has approximately 10 regular volunteers during the year. Full-time staff are available in the reading room during the libraries regular hours of operation. All archival materials are housed onsite in a temperature and humidity controlled environment with mediated access.

**Budget** - AARLCC's Special Collections and Archives annual budget is just under \$400,00.

### **Has your institution ever had a preservation or conservation assessment or consultation?**

In 2012, Leigh Grinstead, Digital Services Consultant for LYRISIS, visited AARLCC for a two- day onsite assessment of the collections, policies, and procedures and to gather information about the collections. The focus of the consultation was on creating an outline to digitize materials in the collection and was not a complete preservation assessment.

### **What is the importance of this project to your institution?**

The two stage project, involving a preservation consultant and a community workshop, supports the mission of AARLCC by bridging the library's three major focus areas: community engagement, education and access. The library was constructed to provide opportunities for the community, library and research centers to cooperate seamlessly. Having no prior full preservation assessment, a dedicated consultant can provide the detailed analysis needed for AARLCC to fulfill its potential. The resulting report will be used by staff to create planning documents for the future of the unique archival collections. As the facility grows older, we need to consider options for updating the environment, storage, shelving and procedures in order to bring the facility to current standards. Further it can be used to outline larger

## African American Research Library and Cultural Center Special Collections Preservation Project

projects, make the case for increased resources, administrative engagement and further underscore the importance of preserving the history of the African diaspora.

The two hands-on workshops will be held during Black History Month 2020, a time of year where the library sees increased patronage. The goal is to empower the community to preserve their history and bridge the relationship between the resources at AARLCC and their potential use. Ideally, AARLCC will be able to preserve the items in our collection while simultaneously engaging generations of potential researchers.

### **What are the names and qualifications of the consultant(s) and staff involved in the project?**

**Thomas Clareson, Consultant:** Mr. Clareson is the Senior Consultant for Digital & Preservation Services at Lyasis. He provides domestic and international consulting and education on preservation and digital program management, disaster preparedness, digital preservation, and cultural heritage market research. Has an expertise in statewide and regional preservation and digitization program development.

**Britt Farley, Head of Special Collections and Archives:** Ms. Farley is the full-time archivist for AARLCC's Special Collections and Archives. She is the lead for developing strategies for collections care and access, research requests, outreach initiatives, and liaison to the community. Ms. Farley received her Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of Florida in 2012 and a Masters Science of Information, with a specialization in archives and technology, from Florida State University in 2015. Ms. Farley has a background in the history of Fort Lauderdale, having grown-up in the city.

**Chinedu Amaefula, Special Collections Librarian:** Mr. Amaefula is the full-time librarian for AARLCC's Special Collections and Archives. He assists with reading room requests, displays and special collections initiatives. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Africana Studies from Tennessee State University in 2011 and Masters of Art in Africana Studies and Library Science from Indiana University-Bloomington in 2014 and 2016, respectively. Mr. Amaefula specializes in Africana, notably Nigerian, studies.

### **H. What is the work plan for the project?**

**August 30, 2019** - Notification of award; Consultant is notified; schedule onsite consultation

**September 2019** - Project starts; Supplies ordered for preservation workshops

**October - November 2019** - Consultant conducts onsite preservation assessment and produces a report on collection needs

**December 2019 – January 2020** – Staff reviews report, creates action list to update environmental, storage, rehousing needs. Marketing for the preservation workshops begins

**February 2020** - Two preservation workshops offered to public

**March 2020** - Final report submitted to NEH