

Celebrating annual African American events

By Gerald V. Holmes

Promote the rich heritage of African Americans

African American History Month is a time for librarians and faculty to focus on various ways to promote the resources and services available to faculty and students in libraries. Although resources on this topic are important to educators at all levels of learning, this article focuses only on higher education. Alfred Young explains that

... during the month of February of each year, colleges and universities, elementary and secondary schools, churches, civic and social organizations throughout the country sponsor activities which highlight the achievements and contributions made by Afro-Americans. . . . the primary purpose of these activities is to instill within Afro-Americans a sense of pride and accomplishment and to inform the general public of Black America's glorious past.¹

African American History Month can also serve as a motivational time to help prepare future African Americans to be scholars and leaders in our society. It is a time when African Americans can learn from the past while they prepare themselves for the future.

One way to do this is to take advantage of the many resources available in an academic library. In 1926 Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded "Negro History Week" which later became "Black History Month." He also founded the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life

and History and wrote the book *Mis-education of the Negro*, which states

... the scholars under discussion all shared a common goal, namely, to provide for Negro youth access to historical information and education which would be "true" and thus nullify or diminish the false and belittling propaganda type of history which had been handed to them by whites. This, it was felt, would build up the black child's self and race knowledge as well as his self-respect. In a larger sense they expected that their publications would at least partly fill the unjustifiable void in American History and its antecedents, reveal the existing distortions of actual facts, and constitute a service to the entire field of historical and social science writing and understanding.²



Photo credit: Denise Sharp

Gerald Holmes reads a poem at the 6th Annual African American Read-In Chain at the University of Cincinnati.

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Some of the ways that libraries can help to promote the availability of this information include:

- assisting African Americans who want to study their heritage;
- assisting patrons from other cultures who want to research topics related to African American culture;
- seeking support for special programs on African American history;
- identifying ways to better serve African Americans.

In addition to African American History Month, other annual African American events include Kwanza (December 26–January 1) and Martin Luther King Jr. Day (third Monday in January). Libraries play a key role in providing significant information on African American history and biographical information on noted African Americans. In the past, African Americans did not always have access to these collections, but this has changed. We are reminded by Hill that

... programs and services were developed to reach the nontraditional library users, resulting in greater access to information for Blacks and other minorities. . . . Remember, libraries did not always serve all people. Before the mid-1800's, libraries were mostly for scholars, university students, and the rich. Years of struggle by progressive librarians eventually changed this narrow role of libraries, and made them the open, vital information centers they are today.⁵



This image from the homepage of the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University was created by Ellis Wilson and is called "The Funeral Procession."

Not only are libraries now open to all people and the resources they contain available to anyone who needs them, members of the ALA, especially the Black Caucus of ALA (BCALA), have played a leadership role in recruiting African Americans to the library profession and supporting initiatives to develop library collections in the area of African American history.

Four ways to celebrate African American events include presenting: 1) annual displays and exhibits; Associated Publishers produces a kit that focuses on a yearly theme—the theme for the 1996 kit is "African American Women: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow";⁴ 2) lectures that invite faculty, campus administrators, city or state officials, and visiting scholars to participate; 3) group readings that can be organized similar to the brown bag luncheon book talk format where each luncheon focuses on the specifics of a particular author or book; and 4) multimedia presentations that include videos featuring African American themes. In 1990 the African American Read-In Chain, held every first Sunday or Monday in February until the year 2000, was organized. First sponsored by the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the local organizers are asked to assemble programs that highlight readings worldwide. In 1995, at the University of Cincinnati, a video series was aired on a closed-circuit library cable broadcast system for educational purposes. Also in 1995, a similar program format at the Shrine of the Black Madonna Bookstore & Cultural Center in Houston sponsored a weekly series of multimedia presentations which included *AFRICA: Center of the World*, *African Holocaust & Diaspora*, *Harlem Renaissance*, and *The Black Power Movement*. Ideas like these are just a few ways that the library can creatively honor outstanding African Americans.

Graphic displays on the Internet

Another idea to consider when sponsoring upcoming African American events is to lure students, faculty, and staff into using innovative library resources to feature remote research materials via electronic networks. The World Wide Web homepages, Netscape, and Mosaic combine creativity, information, and network access within minutes.

Three examples of Web homepages are:

- **The Uptown Chamber of Commerce Harlem Week 1995 Web Page**, which aired an events calendar with the theme "A Harlem

Resources for celebrating African American events

Books and software

For vendors who produce audio books, graphics software, a directory of Internet Resources, and companies that can assist libraries looking for materials that are out of print contact the following:

Audio books

JIMCIN Recordings [Portsmouth, Rhode Island, (800) 538-3034] has a collection of audio books that includes *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Souls of Black Folk*, and *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

Graphics software

AfroLink Software [Los Angeles, (213) 731-5465] has a collection of graphics for fliers, posters, and exhibits.

Internet resources directory

On Demand Press [Columbia, Maryland, (410) 720-1249] publishes the title *African American Resource Guide to the Internet*.

Out of print services

Sylvester & Orphanos, Booksellers & Publishers [Hollywood, California, (213) 461-1194].

University Microfilm, Inc. (UMI) [Ann Arbor, Michigan, (800) 521-0600].

African-American: Books By and About Catalog, Waiting for Godot Books [Hadley, Massachusetts, (413) 585-5126].

Internet resources

For discussion listservs and electronic journals that can assist librarians looking for materials and information, contact the following:

Electronic discussion listservs

AFAM-L, African American research forum for exchange of information, ideas, and concerns of African American studies and of African Americans. *Subscribe:* LISTSERV@MIZZOU1; LISTSERVE@MIZZOU1.MISSOURI.EDU.

AFAS-L, ACRL's Afro-American Studies Librarian's Section discussion focused on African American studies and librarianship that may include peripheral issues such as race relations and multicultural diversity. *Subscribe:* LISTSERV@KENTVM; LISTSERV@KENTVM.KENT.EDU

E-journals

EJAS-L, *Electronic Journal for Africana Studies*, is a biennial, peer-reviewed electronic journal which communicates scholarly thought on African American studies. *Subscribe:* LISTSERV@KENTVM; LISTSERV@KENTVM.KENT.EDU

EJBlack, *Electronic Journal of Black Librarianship*, is a biennial, peer-reviewed electronic journal which communicates scholarly thought on black librarianship and information science. *Subscribe:* LISTSERV@KENTVM; LISTSERV@KENTVM.KENT.EDU

State of Mind: Oh! What a Beautiful Feeling." Programs included arts and crafts, comedy, education/career, and health. *Access:* <http://www.tmn.com/Artswire/harlemweek/events.html>.

• **Universal Blackpages Website**, produced by the Black Graduate Students Association at Georgia Technical University. *Access:* <http://www.gatech.edu/bgsa/blackpages/info.html>.

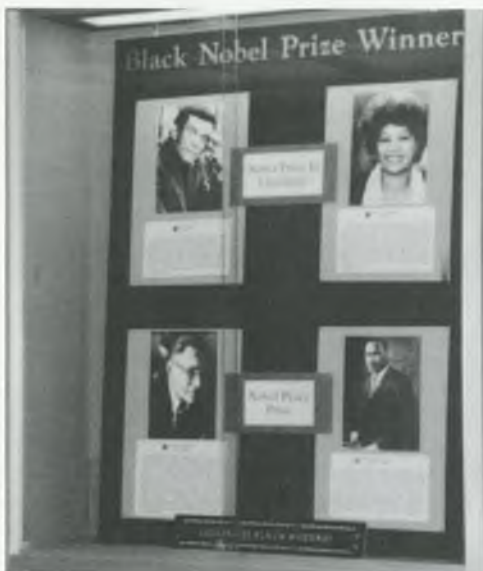
• **Amistad Research Center WWW Home Page at Tulane University**. *Access:* <http://www.arc.tulane.edu>.

Summary

Celebrating annual African American events allows a time to focus on what libraries have

available to support African American students as they pursue their education. It is also a time to focus on how librarians and faculty can help African American students sharpen their skills in library use in order to better prepare them for their chosen careers. In the past, libraries did not always open their doors to all races. For many libraries, as well as college and university campuses, celebrating the accomplishments of African Americans is a new challenge.

Today's library is a challenging resource for most students who desire to learn the intricate details of library research. Students and faculty should be aware that technology is constantly changing and everyone in the university or college community is learning by accommo-



An African American History Month display at Kent State University.

dating to change on a day-to-day basis. From the incoming freshmen to post-doctoral students, African Americans should not be overwhelmed with the vast amount of information

that is available to them when enrolling at a new university or college. Librarians should be eager to help these new students become comfortable using the library and its resources to support their entire academic career, and they should provide a strong foundation to prepare students for the future. African American students should not leave the academic environment without being library literate. To prepare for lifelong learning requires that students continue to acquire new skills, pursue career opportunities, enhance their potential for career advancement, and invest time to develop library research skills.

Notes

1. Alfred Young, "The Historical Origin and Significance of National Afro-American History Month Observance," *Negro History Bulletin* 43 (1980): 6-8.
2. Charles H. Wesley and Thelma D. Perry, introduction to Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1969).
3. Levirn Hill, "Why We Need More Black Librarians," *ABBWA Journal* 4 (1992): 29-30.
4. For information on the kits contact Associated Publishers at (202) 265-1441. ■

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- **Civil War Photographs: From the Library of Congress.** A selection of important photographs. Access: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cwphome.html>.

- **Rare Maps from the University of Georgia.** Colonial, Revolutionary, nineteenth-century, and many other maps housed at the Special Collections of the University of Georgia are made available to the public. Access: <http://scarlett.lib.uga.edu/darchive/hargrett/maps/maps.html>.

- **American Memory Project: Library of Congress.** This remarkable project makes available documents, speeches and other sound recordings, photographs, and, most impressive, some actual scanned manuscripts. Access: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/amhome.html>.

- **American Prohibition Project.** Ohio State University's history homepage provides access to photographs and primary text relating to the history of prohibition from its antecedents in the 1870s through the 1920s. Access: <http://www.cohums.ohio-state.edu/history/projects/prohibition/default.htm>.

Electronic journals

Thus far, electronic journals are not a rich source of information for historians of the U.S. For keeping up with the advent of such journals connect to CICnet. Access: <gopher://gopher.cic.net:2000/11/e-serials/archive>. Or try the Electronic Journals gopher. Access: <gopher://peg.cwis.uci.edu:7000/11/gopher.welcome/peg/ej>.

Bibliographies

An area that promises to be very valuable is that of bibliographies. So far the listservs have been the best source of small reading lists, offered by knowledgeable historians; however, a few lengthy searchable bibliographies are available. The best example is the one on Martin Luther King Jr., from Stanford University, consisting of thousands of sources. Access: <telnet://forsythetn.stanford.edu/>. Note: When you make the connection type socrates for account, then type yes, and then type select mlk.

Please try our Web page for leads to many other sources. Access: <http://www.rutgers.edu/rilib/artshum/amhist.html>. ■