


11-2018

Separate Places, Shared Spaces: Segregated Carnegie Libraries as Community Institutions in the Age of Jim Crow (Presentation for the Southern History Association Annual Meeting, November 2018)

Matthew R. Griffis

University of Southern Mississippi, matthew.griffis@usm.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/rocinformationandresources>

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Architectural History and Criticism Commons](#), [Library and Information Science Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

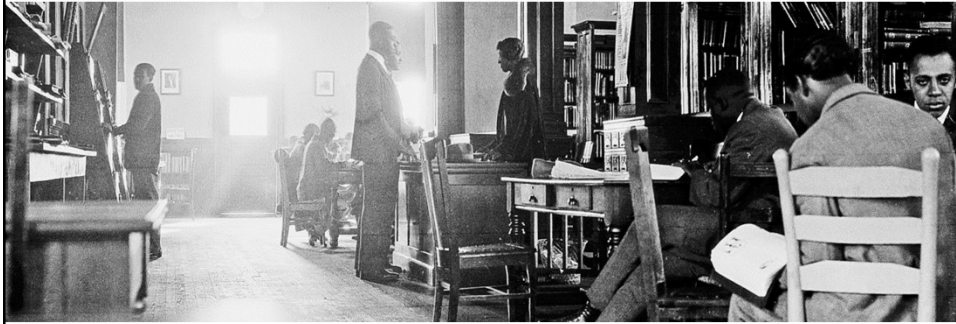
Griffis, Matthew R., "Separate Places, Shared Spaces: Segregated Carnegie Libraries as Community Institutions in the Age of Jim Crow (Presentation for the Southern History Association Annual Meeting, November 2018)" (2018). *Publications and Other Resources*. 1.
<https://aquila.usm.edu/rocinformationandresources/1>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the The Roots of Community at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications and Other Resources by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

Southern Historical Association 2018

SHARED PLACES, SHARED SPACES

Segregated Carnegie Libraries as Community Institutions in the Age of Jim Crow

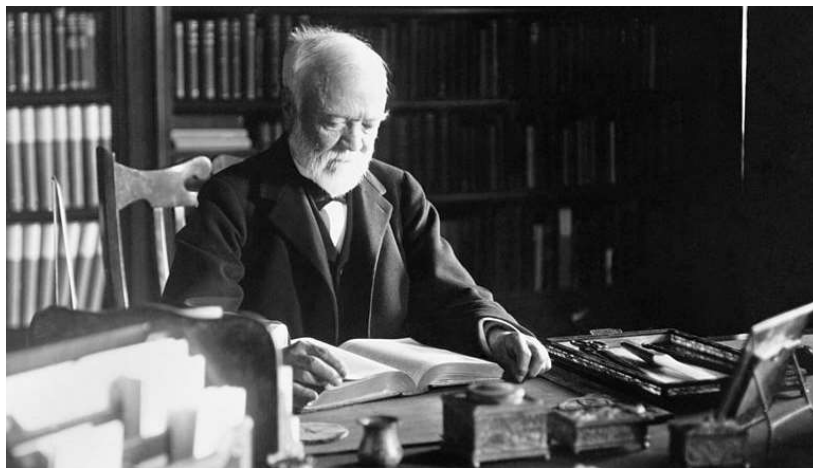


Matthew Griffis, Assistant Professor
School of Library and Information Science, The University of Southern Mississippi

1

Southern Historical Association 2018

Carnegie Library Philanthropy

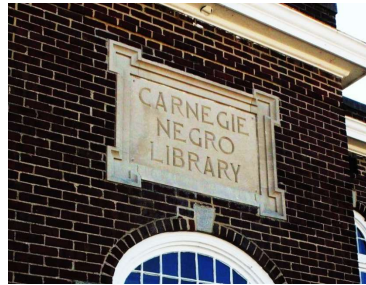


Andrew Carnegie ca. 1906.

2

“Colored” Carnegie Libraries

- Atlanta, GA
- Evansville, IN
- Greensboro, NC
- Houston, TX
- Knoxville, TN
- Louisville, KY (x 2)
- Meridian, MS
- Mound Bayou, MS
- Nashville, TN
- New Orleans, LA
- Savannah, GA



Carnegie Negro Library, Greensboro, NC

3

Houston's “Colored” Carnegie Library



4

Houston's "Colored" Carnegie Library



New York Age, April 1913.

Houston Post, April 1913.

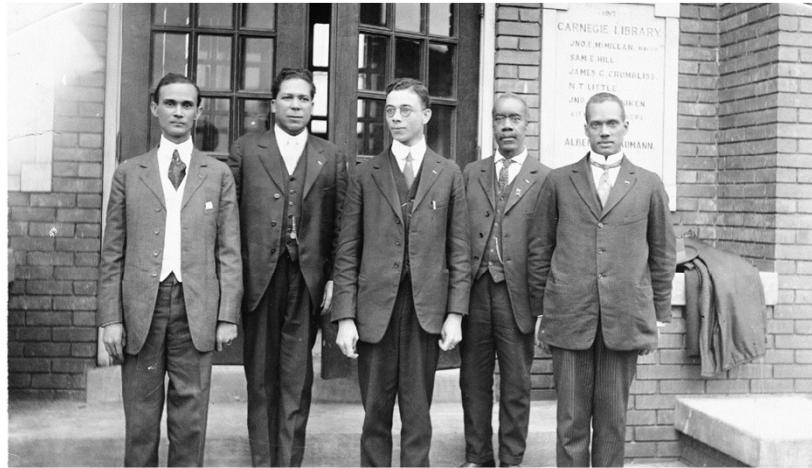
5

Meridian's "Colored" Carnegie Library



6

Library Governance



Knoxville, Tennessee, 1918.

7

Educational Support



Reading room at the East Henry Street Library, Savannah.

8

Educational Support

"My [elementary school] class would walk to the Carnegie Library each week for a visit. We were greeted by the librarian, then proceeded downstairs for storytime or to watch a filmstrip. Afterwards we went upstairs and selected books.... It was a favorite part of the school week for me, and these visits helped begin my lifelong love of books."

- Rosemary McGee, Savannah

"I utilized [the library] more in the summer because my mother always had a little reading list for me, and so I would go to the library And of course, Mrs. Mathis [the branch librarian] would assist me in books that I should be reading."

- Maxine Turner, Meridian

Intellectual Development

"I used to run to the library to flip through the pages and dream. I remember [the magazines]. And I said, 'One day, I'm going to be able to read this, be sophisticated enough to deal with these kinds of things.'"

- Clarence Thomas, Savannah

"My parents couldn't afford encyclopedias or lots of books, so I spent a lot of time at the library reading. And often, especially when I lived within two blocks [of the library], I stayed there until the library closed."

- Jerome Wilson, Meridian

"The library was just down the street from our apartment," he wrote, "so, I solved my problems with the outside world by playing hooky ... and going into the library to read books."

- James Alan McPherson

Literature and Collections



Display at Auburn Branch, Atlanta.

"I was curious about the slaves and how that all came about. And of course, initially, at 9 years old, I didn't fully understand. And it was [the librarian] Ms. Mathis who helped expand and give me a better understanding. In fact, I learned more about African American history—or at least, back then, "Negro history"—in that library."

- Jerome Wilson, Meridian

"[It was] good to know about your ancestors, because you've heard so many negative things about black folk and now you have it in writing of people who've accomplished things. I think it's great for people to know about the contributions blacks have made."

- Ms. Futch, Savannah

11

Community Meeting Space



Assembly room at the Western Colored Branch Library, Louisville, KY.

12

Community Meeting Space



"The [library] will have served its purpose only in part if it becomes only the center of the activities of the reading colored people of this community. There is not today in the city of Knoxville ... a single decent place, with the exception of stores or offices, where a colored man or woman can go for rest and relaxation."

- Charles Warner Cansler, at the opening of Knoxville's Library, 1918

13

Neighborhood Library

"On my frequent hikes to the Western Branch, I crossed indisputably black territory, encountering a rich diversity of sounds, colors, structures, broken and smooth sidewalks, dereliction, poverty and excess, stylish hustlers and down-at-the-heels beggars."

- Houston Baker, Louisville (taken from *I Don't Hate the South*, 2007).



14

Shared Experience and Identity

"Since I was in public, the seemingly infinite variety of my reading was complemented by an endless variety of library occupants, who were young and old, able-bodied and physically challenged, soft and loud, bellicose and deferential. Naturally, all of the library's patrons were black, or, as we then called ourselves: colored.

"What was so clearly inferable at the Western Branch Library were not only general, democratic vistas of American reading but also specifically African American diasporic valuations of literacy, the library, the habits of public reading as a certain path—in the designation of the great black orator and writer Frederick Douglass—from slavery to freedom."

- Houston Baker, Louisville (taken from *I Don't Hate the South*, 2007).



Reading room in Louisville (Western Branch)

15

Conclusion



16

Contact

Feel free to contact me at matthew.griffis@usm.edu.

Acknowledgement

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, grant #RE-31-16-0044-16.

The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.



17

Photo Credits

Slide 1: Jackson Davis Collection of African American Photographs, University of Virginia Special Collections Library.

Slides 2, 3 and 5: Roots of Community Collection.

Slides 4 and 13: Houston Area Digital Archives, Houston Public Library Special Collections.

Slide 6: Meridian-Lauderdale County Public Library.

Slide 7: Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library.

Slide 8: Foltz Photography Studio Photographs, Georgia Historical Society.

Slide 11: Auburn Branch Library Records, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History.

Slides 12 and 15: Western Branch Library African American Archives, Louisville Free Public Library.

Slide 14: City Archives and Special Collections, New Orleans Public Library.

18