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MAKING VOICES HEARD: Collecting and Sharing Oral Histories from Users of Segregated Libraries in the South

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“Colored” Carnegie Libraries

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

Research Objectives

- to document the history of all 12 segregated Carnegie libraries
- to investigate the role they played as places of learning and community-making
- to complete oral history interviews with former users and make these interviews publicly available

Deliverables

- project website
- completed oral history interviews (audio and transcripts)
- articles for BlackPast.org, journal articles
- monograph (with summary of findings)
- toolkit for practitioners
Archival Methods

- archival research Y1:
  - Meridian, MS
  - Mound Bayou, MS
  - Louisville, KY
  - New Orleans, LA
  - Atlanta, GA
  - Savannah, GA

Oral Histories

- 30-40 minutes
- recollections of library and community
- 4 interviews completed (2 more pending)
- recruitment ongoing

Recruitment

- leads/referrals
- info from past news articles
- community organizations
- project website (submission form)
- posters and fliers
Auburn Branch Library, Atlanta, Georgia (1913-50)

The Auburn Branch Library was a renovated branch of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta and was the Atlanta Public Library System’s oldest library. Opened in 1917, it represented the first publicly funded library for African-Americans, and it was the result of a successful campaign to raise funds to build public libraries in Atlanta. The library was upgraded in 1950 to add a children’s room, a civic center, and a beauty parlor. In 1969, it was renamed to honor former City Manager John Henry Dolsie (1859-1921).

The Auburn Branch was largely attended by African-Americans in the early years of its operation. When the Carnegie library of Atlanta (CUL) was established in 1901, it was estimated that 30,000 African-Americans were not using any of the libraries in Atlanta. Representation from African-American communities, including the Atlanta University professor. However, the branch was not open to African-Americans for the first two years. After the city opened the branch, it operated as a separate entity with its own staff and budget. The branch was staffed by African-American librarians, and it was the first public library in the city to be staffed by African-Americans. The branch was closed in 1950 and replaced by the Auburn Branch, which opened in 1951.

This branch is now used as a community center and is maintained by the city of Atlanta.

Addie Mae Dickenson was a passenger on the bus that was attacked by a mob in 1964. She was one of the four students who were arrested and later forced to leave the branch.
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The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.
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