

3-2017

Capturing Their Stories: Collecting Oral Histories from Users of Segregated Libraries in the South (Presentation for the Southern History of Education Society Annual Meeting, March 2017)

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CAPTURING THEIR STORIES: Collecting Oral Histories from Users of Segregated Libraries in the South



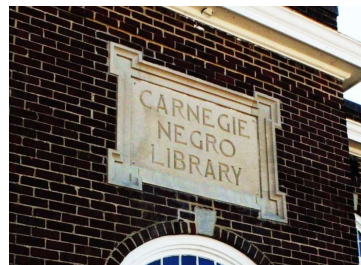
Matthew Griffis, Assistant Professor
School of Library and Information Science, The University of Southern Mississippi
March, 2017

1

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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



2

“Colored” Carnegie Libraries



3

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

Theoretical Framework

- the development of public libraries in the United States (Lee, 1965; Harris, 1973; Garrison, 1979)
- “sense of community” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)
- “sense of place” (Lefebvre, 1974, 1991; Oldenburg, 1989)

4

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Archival Methods

- Meridian, MS (Sep 2016)
- Mound Bayou, MS (Nov 2016)
- Louisville, KY (Western Branch) (Feb 2017)
- Louisville, KY (Eastern Branch) (Feb 2017)



Oral Histories

- with former users (30-40 mins.)
- recorded and transcribed
- focus on recollections of library, of community
- 3 interviews completed (2 more pending)



5

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Recruitment

- leads/referrals from librarians and archivists
- past news articles about libraries or Civil-Rights-related events
- community organizations
- project website (submission form)
- posters and fliers
- publicity: *Southern Miss Now*, *Meridian Star*, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*

Did you use the
Western or Eastern Branch Libraries
back in the 1950s or 1960s?



If **yes**, you can help **record the history** of these important public libraries.

The Western Branch of the Louisville Free Public Library, founded in 1905, was the first free public library for African-Americans in the United States. The Eastern Branch, which opened in 1914, served the Smoketown neighborhood until it closed in the mid-1970s.

I would like to locate individuals that visited these libraries back in the 1960s, 1950s, or even earlier, and preserve their memories for future generations to hear and read. The project is being funded with a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

If you can help with the project in any way, please contact me at 601-266-4228 or matthew.gillis@usm.edu. Your help is much appreciated.

Sincerely,
Dr. Matthew Gillis
Assistant Professor of
Library and Information Science
The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive, #1146
Hattiesburg, MS 39402



6

Online Archive





THE ROOTS OF COMMUNITY PROJECT
Carnegie Libraries for African Americans 1908-1924

Oral History with Jerome Wilson
November 18, 2016

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Biography

Dr. Jerome Wilson was born in Meridian, Mississippi in 1942. He attended St. Joseph's Catholic School in Meridian from kindergarten to secondary school, whereupon he attended Olin College in New Orleans to earn a BA in Chemistry and Mathematics. Wilson later earned an MA in Immunology and Biochemistry from Cornell and, in 1963, earned his PhD in Epidemiology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He spent much of his career as a researcher and a research administrator in the pharmaceutical industry, later transitioning to academia where he helped set up the department of epidemiology at Howard University. Over the course of his career Wilson held appointments at the National Cancer Institute's Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, the Howard University Cancer Center and the Georgetown University School of Medicine, among others.

In later years Wilson took up historical research. In 2010 he and his co-author, Dr. Ethel Young (also a Meridian native) of Kean University, published *African American Children and Missionary Nurses and Parents in Mississippi: Achievement Against Jim Crow Odds*, a book about their educational experiences at Meridian's St. Joseph's Catholic School.

In his youth, Wilson lived within walking distance of Meridian's "colored library" on 13th Street. This oral history interview, conducted on 18 November 2016, focuses on Wilson's recollections of that library and his memories of Meridian in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Transcript

Griffis: This is Dr. Matthew Griffis of the University of Southern Mississippi interviewing Jerome Wilson on November 18th, 2016. I'm in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in my office at the University. Dr. Wilson is Rockville, Maryland. We are, of course, conducting this interview over the phone. And this is an oral history interview for the Roots of Community Project.

1

7

Contact

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

Acknowledgement

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8

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