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## A Cornerstone of Community: Houston's Colored Library, 1913 to 1961 (Presentation for Donor Appreciation Day, African American Library at the Gregory School, Houston Public Library, June 2018)

Matthew R. Griffis

University of Southern Mississippi, [matthew.griffis@usm.edu](mailto:matthew.griffis@usm.edu)

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African American Library at the Gregory School

## A CORNERSTONE OF COMMUNITY: A History of Houston's Colored Library 1913-1961

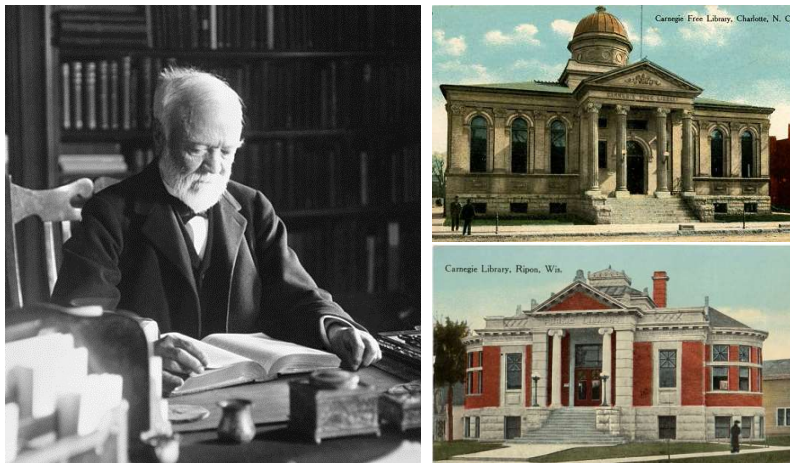


Matthew Griffis, Assistant Professor  
School of Library and Information Science, The University of Southern Mississippi

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African American Library at Gregory School

## Carnegie Libraries



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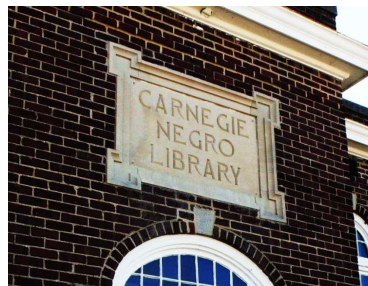
## Libraries for African Americans, ca. 1900



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## “Colored” Carnegie Libraries

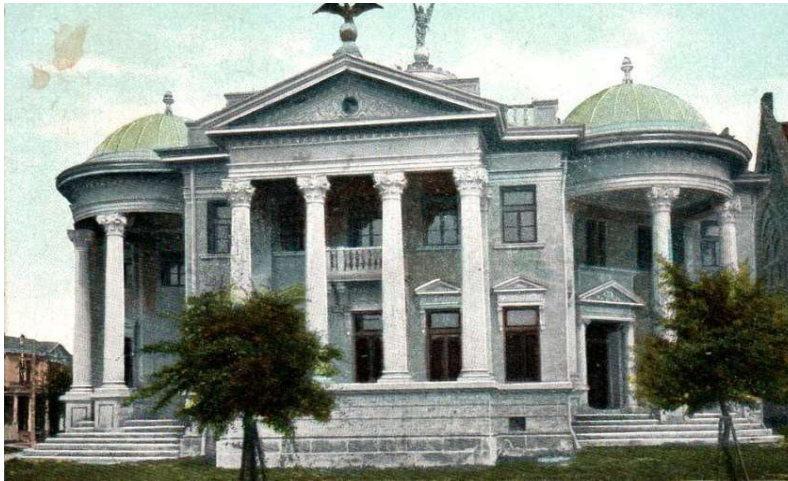
- Atlanta, GA
- Evansville, IN
- Greensboro, NC
- Houston, TX
- Knoxville, TN
- Louisville, KY (x 2)
- Meridian, MS
- Mound Bayou, MS
- Nashville, TN
- New Orleans, LA
- Savannah, GA



*“Carnegie Negro Library”, Greensboro, NC*

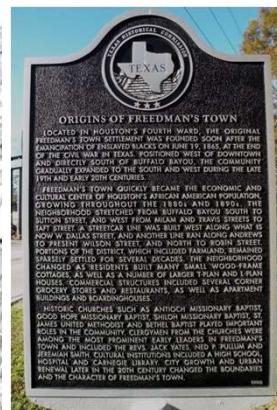
4

## Houston's Carnegie Library, 1904



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## Fourth Ward



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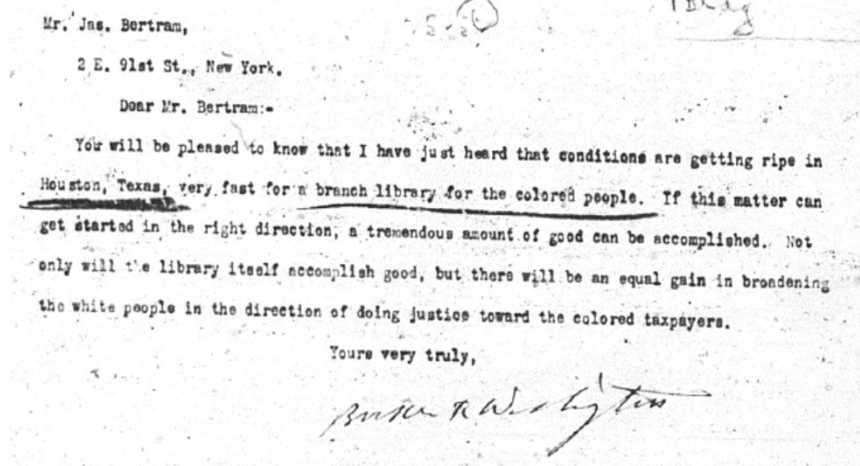


## First Colored Library, 1909



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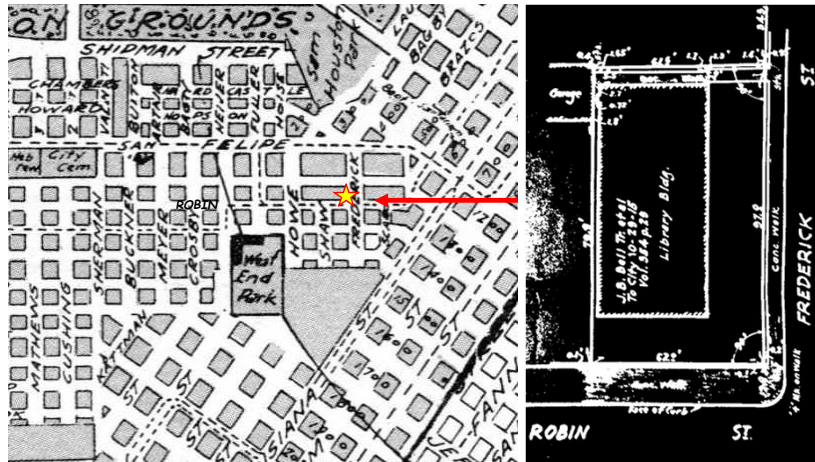
## Help from Booker T. Washington



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African American Library at Gregory School

## Frederick and Robin Streets



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## Library Opening, April 1913



New York Age, April 1913.



Houston Post, April 1913.

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## Library Opening, April 1913



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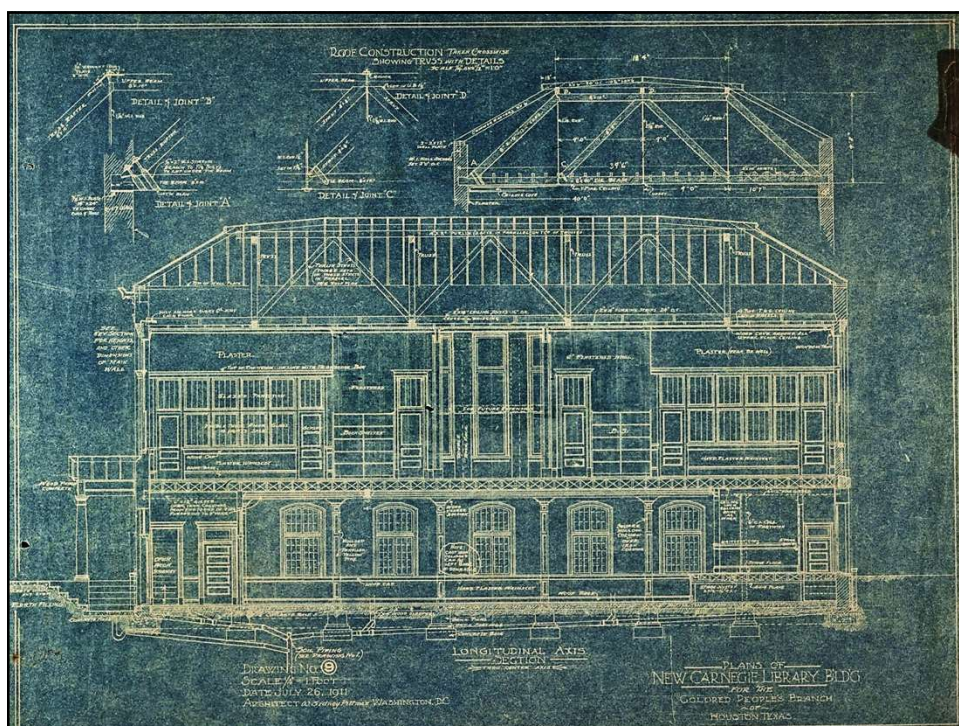
## William Sidney Pittman, architect



William Sidney Pittman and his wife Portia, daughter of Booker T. Washington.

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## African American Library at Gregory School

### Librarians, 1909-60

#### Colored Library:

- o Emma Myers (1909-11)
- o Pauline Lewis (1911-13)
- o Lillian Hostettler (?)

#### Colored Carnegie Library:

- o Bessie Osborne (1913-21)

#### Colored Carnegie Branch:

- o Bessie Osborne (1922-32, 1936-37)
- o James Hulbert (1933-35)
- o Murphy Kibbe (1935)
- o Florence Bandy (1930s-40s)
- o Willie Bell Anderson (1940s-50s)



Pittsburg Courier, March 1936.

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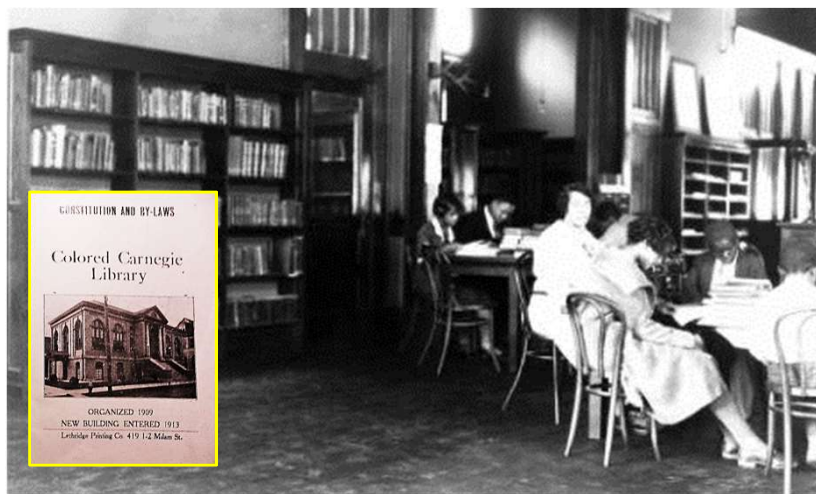


## Colored Carnegie Branch, 1922



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## Books and Literature



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## Programs and Partnerships

### Negroes of Houston Plan Sale of Red Cross Seals

F. Rivers Barnwell, lecturer to negroes, returned Friday from a trip to Victoria, where he made plans for the sale of Red Cross seals among the negroes of that city.

He will co-operate with Dr. F. Light, pastor of the Antioch church, in putting on the sale of stamps among the negroes of Houston.

R. Stockwell, chairman of the anti-tuberculosis association, will make an address in a few days before the negroes at the negro library.

*Houston Post, 1919*



School children visit, ca. 1940s.

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## Community Space



Auditorium at Louisville's Western Branch.

### Inaugurate Membership Drive for Local Branch of Colored Association

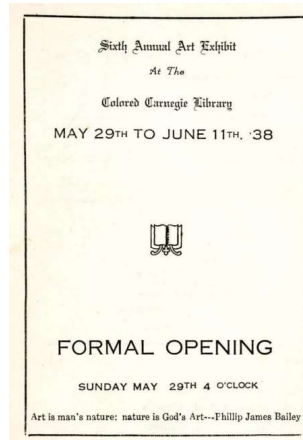
The Houston branch, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, will inaugurate a membership drive with a mass meeting at 3:30 p. m. Sunday at the Mount Vernon Methodist Episcopal church, Clark and Burnett streets. Rev. E. H. Holden, pastor of the church, announces an interesting program has been prepared.

At 8:30 p. m. Monday the Houston branch will hold a business meeting at the Carnegie (negro) library. One of the important matters to come before the meeting will be to consider representation at the anti-lynching conference to be held in New York May 5 and 6.

*Houston Post, 1919.*

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## Community Space



*Negro Art Guild of Houston.*

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## Desegregation and Last Years, 1953-60



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## Closure and Demolition, 1958-61



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## Conclusions

Colored Carnegie Libraries:

- provided "educational uplift"
- symbolized independence (albeit limited)
- connected and supported community organizations
- accumulated important collections of African American literature and history
- promoted reading and free association/"shared identity"



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## 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)

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## Do you remember the Carnegie Branch?

I am attempting to locate people who visited the library and preserve their memories for future generations.

If you can help in any way, please contact me at **601-266-4228** or [matthew.griffis@usm.edu](mailto:matthew.griffis@usm.edu).

You are invited to take with you:

- a project flier
- my business card



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## Contact

Feel free to contact me at [matthew.griffis@usm.edu](mailto: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.



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## Photo Credits

**Slides 1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 15-17, 19-21:** Houston Area Digital Archives, Houston Public Library Special Collections.

**Slides 2, 4, 5, 10, 14, 17, 18:** Roots of Community Collection.

**Slides 3 and 22:** Jackson Davis Collection of African American Photographs, University of Virginia Special Collections Library.

**Slide 6:** Texas State Historical Society.

**Slide 8:** Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, Columbia University Archives and Special Collections.

**Slide 9:** *Houston History Alliance (special thanks to Ron Bass).*

**Slide 12:** Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

**Slides 18 and 23:** Western Branch Library African American Archives, Louisville Free Public Library.

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