



LEFT An after-treatment reference photograph of the Lem Hawkins' Confession lobby card. RIGHT Tigerbelle track team and Coach Edward S. Temple with medals from a 1958 meet in Moscow, courtesy of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Special Collections.

Building Capacity: The HBCU Library Alliance and CCAHA

Nine years before the first shot of the Civil War, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania was founded, now viewed as the nation's first still-operating HBCU (Historically Black College and University). As 100+ more HBCUs steadily opened—spread across 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—the academic libraries within the HBCUs found themselves serving as repositories for the historical documents of their faculty, alumni, and communities. Looking back now, many of these documents are true treasures. They record and preserve a history too long overlooked and disregarded.

The HBCU libraries and their archives offer irreplaceable documentation of the African-American experience in the 19th and 20th century centuries, reflecting the monumental themes of slavery, Civil War, Restoration, the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter, and so much more. Complementing these broad themes, the HBCU special collections also spotlight the contributions of individuals in countless fields—from science to politics and from arts to athletics—with the work of very familiar names preserved alongside lesser-known figures who nonetheless left material that can offer unparalleled insight into their time or area of expertise.

For more than a decade, CCAHA has been honored to work side-by-side with the HBCU Library Alliance, a consortium dedicated to strengthening the libraries and archives at 76 member HBCUs. Initially, CCAHA's photograph conservators joined a multi-institutional team who worked on a series of Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grants to upgrade collection stewardship of historic photograph collections at a selected group of HBCUs.

Then, in 2018, CCAHA's involvement with the HBCU Library Alliance took full flight with the collaborative development of a new five-year program, *Building Capacity: HBCU*, with significant funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation. Launched in 2019, the ambitious *Building Capacity: HBCU* program aims to support new preservation initiatives at all interested HBCU member libraries.

The treasures held by HBCUs are astounding. Here's just a sampling:

- ▶ An original draft of *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin at the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library (GA).
- ▶ Manuscript material covering Mary McLeod Bethune's remarkable career as educator and civil rights activist at Bethune-Cookman University (FL).
- ▶ Forty linear feet of manuscript and printed material relating to the life of 20th century poet and feminist Audre Lorde at Spelman College (GA).
- ▶ Manuscripts of W. E.B. Du Bois' speeches at Prairie View A&M University (TX).
- ▶ Documentation of the life of Edward S. Temple, legendary women's track coach who nurtured the athletic careers of 40 Olympic athletes including Wilma Rudolph at Tennessee State University (TN).
- ▶ A collection of New Orleans' festival costumes, including the elaborate costumes of the Mardi Gras Indians, at Southern University at New Orleans (LA).
- ▶ The Booker T. Washington Collections at Tuskegee University (AL).
- ▶ Documentation of the existence of over 800 former schools for African Americans in 15 southern states at Fisk University (TN).
- ▶ The archive of Matthew A. Henson, the first African-American Arctic explorer, at Morgan State University (MD).

The HBCU Library Alliance and CCAHA are currently providing the first round of services competitively offered to ten HBCU libraries. The libraries will receive a mix of preservation needs assessments, emergency plans that address special collections, and collection surveys.

Building Capacity: HBCU stresses the importance of following a long-term incremental process for upgrading collection stewardship. It encourages all participating HBCUs to follow a recommended long-term strategy which builds from developing core documents—preservation needs assessments, emergency plans, and collection management policies to more specific projects such as digitization and rehousing. Nevertheless, this approach is always considered a guideline rather than a strict rule. If there are needs that require immediate attention, *Building Capacity: HBCU* allows for flexibility.

While the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have slowed the implementation of *Building Capacity: HBCU* in 2020, the first ten projects are offering an exciting start that will lay solid groundwork for important future work. As the HBCU libraries emerge from the COVID-19 restrictions, *Building Capacity: HBCU*

will offer a strong incentive to build upon these opportunities, and continue to proudly share these important histories.