DC Africana Archives Project

![Council on Library and Information Resources logo]

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"Bring Democracy Home" Poster, Courtesy of DC Statehood Party Records, MS 0816, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

D.C. Africana Archives Project

- Process 125 collections related to Africana history and culture in Washington, D.C.

- Provide access to processed collections to enhance the understanding of the multiple narratives of the history of this region.

- Increase the amount of local history presented by teachers in the classroom using the historical narratives in the processed collections.

- Attract and inform students of all classifications, high school and collegiate, of the significance of Africana history.

- Engage communities through public programming and educational outreach.

DCAAP Partner Sites

- Archives Center, National Museum of American History

- District of Columbia Archives

- D.C. Public Library, MLK, Jr. Memorial Library

- Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

- Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University

- Special Collections, George Washington University

Doretha Williams, George Washington University, Project Director

- Create a community among the partner sites
  - Meetings
  - Programs
  - Visibility at institutions and programming
- Maintain communication with partner sites
  - Monitoring collection management
  - Resolving issues regarding collections or student employment, when needed

- Review and approve selected collections
  - Research and set historical narratives to within collections, individually and as a whole
  - Approval of selected collections at each site
- Implement Educational Components
  - Undergraduate classes
  - High School classes
- Presenting DCAAP to various audiences
  - Conferences
  - University Departments
  - Public forums

Alex Krensky, George Washington University, Project Archivist

- Maintain relationships at six partner sites

- Supervise student processing assistants
  - Keep track of hours worked/time cards
  - Ensure processing goals are being met

- Create individualized processing plans for each collection
  - Some collections have specific arrangement needs
  - Need to be aware of preservation concerns even though preservation wasn't part of the grant
  - Collections range in size from 0.25 cubic feet to over 500 cubic feet

- Generate EAD finding aids
  - Use container lists created by students
  - Write original description based on container lists, info from collection files

- Edit and maintain schedule for Tumblr posts

Finding Aid Workflow

Students:
- Submit container lists in spreadsheet (.xlsx) format

Project Archivist
- Manipulates spreadsheet to create an arrangement/series if applicable
- Converts spreadsheet into XML/EAD
- Imports EAD into Archivist's Toolkit
- Writes descriptive notes for collection
- Submits to site coordinator for review

Site Coordinator
- Reviews finding aid for content
- Submits back to project archivist

Project Archivist
- Makes necessary edits
- Uploads finding aid to the web

Trello:

Anne McDonough

Library & Collections Director, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

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Partner Institution Role

- HSW is one of **6 local partner institutions** participating in DCAAP

- HSW is a **small organization** (four full-time staff, 2 in collections) with **vast holdings** (1.25 miles of processed collections if put end-to-end), a **limited budget**, and relatively **low-tech** capabilities

- HSW has **one staff member assigned** to work with DCAAP administration, project director, project archivist and student processors

- HSW now has **9 collections** that were previously unprocessed that are now available for researchers
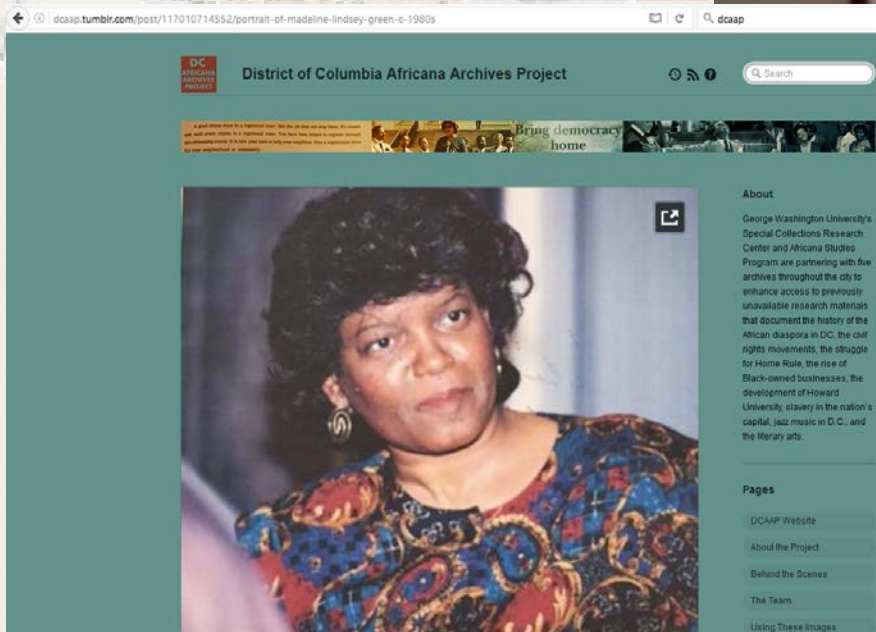
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Partner Institution Role

Partner Institution Role

Madeline Lindsey Green papers

Theodora Danylevich, George Washington University English Department

- Doctoral student writing a feminist, African-Americanist, disability studies dissertation.
- **Processing Assistant**, DCAAP, 2015-2016.

Project Director—Suggestions for Future Projects

1. Host Institutional Engagement
   1. How supportive is the host institution
   2. How to create a stronger foundation of support from host institution
   3. How to manage a project featuring two "schools" at one institution

2. Potential to Expand
   1. How to grow additional related projects from one time-restrained project during the grant
   2. How to plant seeds through other projects and with site partners to continue the project after the grant ends

3. Scope of Collections
   1. What is the scope of collections across the institutions
   2. How will each institution commit to the project

Project Archivist--Suggestions for Future Projects

1. Do we all share the same concept of More Product Less Process?
   - Include site supervisors in on student trainings so all can be on the same page
   - *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections* by Daniel A. Santamaria

   Principles of an Extensible Processing program

   16 Chapter 2

   1. Create a baseline level of access to all collections material.
   2. Create standardized, structured description.
   3. Manage archival materials in the aggregate.
   4. Do no harm: limit physical handling and processing.
   5. Iterate by conducting further processing in a systematic but flexible way.
   6. Approach processing holistically.

   Adherence to these principles can empower archivists to create flexible and iterative processing programs, and help even those with limited resources to devise realistic strategies to provide access to their holdings.

2. How institutions serve up their own finding aids if at all
   - some use Word docs, some have paper finding aids on site, some don't have any at all
   - Be realistic about sustainability of finding aids

3. Managing students offsite requires constant vigilance
   - Weekly meetings to ensure goals are being met AND STICK TO THEM!
   - Compile container lists as they're submitted so you don't have to do it all at the end

Partner Institution
Suggestions for Future Projects

1. **Build** partner institutions into the project budget and provide access to all non-proprietary grant information.

2. **Draw** on student pool that includes archives students and/or those with archival experience, particularly if processing is the focus of the grant.

3. **Explain** anticipated responsibilities of institution when soliciting partners, beyond identifying relevant collections for grant application.

4. **Emphasize** benefits to partner institutions beyond that of providing (paid) processors to work with hidden collections.

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Partner Institution Take-Aways

1. **Better description**: Accession records, even brief ones, need to reflect demographic information on a more consistent basis, in hopes of helping identify relevant collections for future grants.

2. **Continued collaboration**: Partner institutions should build on collegial network to collaborate on identifying themes addressed by the DCAAP collections, re-presenting the finding aids by relevant subject.

3. **Obstacles tackled:** Those without Archivists Toolkit or ArchivesSpace, etc. should purchase PDF->Word doc software in order to update existing DCAAP finding aids as processing continues/editing needs are identified.

4. **Balance needed:** Toggle between the competing principals of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* and *Perfect is the Enemy of the Good*.

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Processing Assistant—Suggestions for Future Projects

1. Wish we had more access to "what is known"

2. Working solo on a collection is the ideal, BUT

3. Collections are unpredictable

4. A wonderful alternative to adjuncting at the end of your Ph.D. program!

5. Other unintended positive outcomes

DCAAP Social Media

library.gwu.edu/dcaap

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dcaap.tumblr.com

Questions?

Photograph from VFW Ladies Auxiliary Collection in Washingtoniana Archives, DC Public Library