

AVERY



— MESSENGER

SPRING 2012

**BOTTLE
TREE:
A BLESSED
MEMORIAL**

LORENZO DOW
TURNER

**DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST
REFLECTIONS**

**AVERY PUBLIC AND
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

INCREASING AFRICAN-AMERICAN
DIVERSITY IN ARCHIVES

COMMUNITY ARCHIVES:
GOING BEYOND THE REPOSITORY

A PUBLICATION FOR

AVERY RESEARCH CENTER
FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

College of Charleston
125 Bull Street | Charleston, SC 29424
Ph: 843.953.7609 • Fax: 843.953.7607
Archives: 843.953.7608
avery.cofc.edu

AVERY INSTITUTE
OF AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
P.O. Box 21492 | Charleston, SC 29413

STAFF

Patricia Williams Lessane, *Executive Director*
Robert Chase, *Public Historian*
Curtis J. Franks, *Curator; Coordinator of Facilities
& Public Programs*
Savannah Frierson, *Administrative Assistant*
Georgette Mayo, *Processing Archivist*
Deborah Wright, *Reference Librarian*

STUDENTS/TEMPORARY STAFF

Shelia Harrell-Roye, *Graduate Assistant*
Aaisha Haykal, *HistoryMakers Fellow*
Betsy Hicks, *Graduate Assistant*
A.J. Johnson, *Undergraduate Intern*
Emily Rousseau, *Graduate Assistant*
Brioshia Sanders, *Undergraduate Intern*

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**MESSAGE FROM
DR. DAVID COHEN**

FEBRUARY 2012

I am excited. The Avery Research Center team, led by Patricia Williams Lessane, is going places. You all see the remarkable public programming, like the recent *Daughters of the Dust* symposium, but I see something a bit different. I see a unit of the College of Charleston that is performing effectively and efficiently. I see an organization that is operating seamlessly and smoothly with the framework of the university. The Avery Research Center is becoming known on campus as a group that plays well with others. And believe me, this is an accomplishment within the complex, competitive world of a university.

What do I mean by “playing well together?” It’s about partnerships. The *Daughters of the Dust* Symposium was a cooperative venture of both the Avery Research Center and the African-American Studies Program at the College of Charleston. And the cooperation with African-American Studies Program doesn’t stop there. Rather, it’s been extended and made permanent. The Avery Research Center’s new public historian, Dr. Robert Chase, is a member of the African-American Studies faculty and will be teaching regularly in the

program. Patricia, herself, is teaching in the program as well. In a similar fashion, the Avery Research Center’s education outreach component also works part time to arrange and publicize the events and conferences of the Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World (CLAW) program at the College of Charleston. And, just to cite one more example, the archivists and librarians at the Avery Research Center and within the Special Collections Department at Addlestone Library have come together to develop the Lowcountry Digital Library (<http://lowcountrydigital.library.cofc.edu/>), which includes many Avery Research Center materials such as artifacts, oral histories, and personal collections like the Septima Clark scrapbook. These holdings can now be accessed by scholars and students worldwide.

So I hope you will join me in saying, “Patricia, it’s been a grand eighteen months and it’s going to be an even grander eighteen years!”

Dr. David Cohen

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“...2011 was an important year for me, personally, because August 16, 2011 marked my one-year anniversary at The College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center!...”

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

PATRICIA WILLIAMS LESSANE, PH.D.

Dear Friends,

As we start a new year, it is fitting to reflect upon the last year and take stock of our accomplishments and the lessons learned. This past year has been amazing—the Avery Research Center embarked upon a yearlong fundraiser, “Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom”, and I began a quest to run one thousand miles over the course of the year. I am happy to report I am almost there and we are almost at our goal of raising \$25,000! However, 2011 was an important year for me, personally, because August 16, 2011 marked my one-year anniversary at The College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center! It truly has been an amazing ride. In September 2011, we had the honor and pleasure of hosting

filmmaker Julie Dash and convening a two-day symposium in celebration of Dash and the 20th anniversary of her acclaimed film, *Daughters of the Dust*. The event brought together scholars, artists, and film lovers from as far away as Spain to celebrate the beauty and magic of the groundbreaking movie.

This year, we open with “Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner Connecting Communities Through Language”, an exhibit developed by The Smithsonian Institution’s Anacostia Community Museum. We are delighted to bring this dynamic exhibit to the city of Charleston as it celebrates the distinguished career and seminal research of a great African-American scholar, Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner, whose fieldwork validated the uniqueness, complexity, and importance of the Gullah culture and dialect. It is only fitting the exhibition come to Lowcountry where Turner conducted much of his fieldwork before turning his investigation to the Yoruba culture of Nigeria and the syncretism of Yoruba, Catholic, and Native-American cultural elements present in the Afro-

Brazilian community of Salvador do Bahia, Brazil, thus highlighting the connections between the Gullah, Brazilian, and African.

To be sure, Turner’s story and this exhibition, by extension, give voice to unique aspects of Americana—that of self-determination, resiliency, and diversity—all tenets that make our country the great nation it is. Additionally, the exhibition privileges the creation and sustaining power of the African diaspora. We now know that over forty percent of enslaved Africans were bought, sold, and shipped right along these shores, making Charleston a key player in forming the African diaspora. We hope you will visit the Avery Research Center and experience all that “Word, Shout, Song” has to offer!

In closing, thank you once again for your continued support of the Avery Research Center! I look forward to seeing each of you soon.



AVERY INSTITUTE PRESIDENT’S REPORT

CATHERINE BOAGS

Hello Everyone,

I am the new President of the Avery Institute of Afro-American History and Culture Board of Directors after serving for five years as its treasurer. On behalf of the Board, I want to recognize the efforts of our outgoing president, Walter G. Brown, Jr., for all he has done to maintain the Avery Institute as a thriving and viable organization. I look

forward to continuing the work he has started.

Other current officers of the Board are as follows:

- Vice President—Benjamin Anderson
- Treasurer—John Buncum
- Secretary—Angel Payton Harmon

I also want to introduce our newest member to the Board, Mrs. Pearl Gibbs.

As president of the Avery Institute Board, one of my primary goals will be to increase our membership. I am asking each of you to help with this endeavor. Each of you is considered a friend and supporter of the Avery Research Center. Ask your friends to become a member of the Avery Institute to further support it as well.

The Avery Institute Board is currently planning a fundraiser for the 2012 year.

We are working with Sanders Clyde Elementary School and Pure Theater on this project. You can look forward to receiving more information concerning the fundraiser as plans develop.

Our membership Chair, Ms. Pamela Zaresk, has also been active in making information available to the public on the second Sunday of each month on King Street. This is the day downtown King Street is closed to automobile traffic. We encourage you to look for the Avery Institute table near the intersection of Calhoun and King Streets if you are strolling the area on a second Sunday.

Again, thank you for your continued and future support and I look forward to seeing you at Avery Research Center events!

EVERY RESEARCH CENTER ARCHIVE NEWS

By Deborah Wright & Aisha Haykal

RECENTLY PROCESSED COLLECTIONS

REVEREND STEPHEN BRADFORD MCIVER MACKEY PAPERS

The Reverend Stephen Bradford McIver Mackey was an African-American Episcopal priest, who served the Calvary Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC as the deacon in 1934 and vicar from 1940 to 1965. His collection contains records relating to his priesthood, including his course assignments and writings from the Philadelphia Divinity School, drafts of sermons given to the congregation at Calvary Episcopal Church, and photos of the church, Camp Baskervill, and the St. Augustine Conference for Church Workers. Other records in the collection document the work done by his wife Naomi Mackey with the Phillis Wheatley Literary and Social Club and the Kappa Alpha Sorority.

REVEREND JOHN ENWRIGHT PAPERS

Reverend John Enwright was a minister at the Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Charleston, South Carolina from 1949 to 1974. Enwright's collection at the Avery Research Center reflects his personal life, ministerial work, and civic involvement from 1884 to 1975. The collection is arranged into five series: Personal Papers, Ministerial Work, Civic Involvement, Audio Material, and Publications and Clippings. Of particular interest is his speeches and sermons he gave at Beecher Memorial Church in New Orleans, Louisiana; materials documenting the construction and renovation of Plymouth Congregational United Church of

Christ; service bulletins for Plymouth as well as other area churches; and records relating to the programs and services provided by the Shaw Community Center, where he served as chair. Additionally, some records in the collection relate to work done by his wife Eula Enwright.

JAMES E. CAMPBELL PAPERS

An educator and activist, Mr. James Eber Campbell has worked with organizations focused on socialism, Pan-Africanism, freedom struggles, and equity in education. His collection includes correspondence, writings, photographs, books, posters, and other materials documenting his personal, professional, and ideological interests. Topics associated with this collection are education in South Carolina and the United States; South African political and social issues, including apartheid; African-American art, culture, and history; child welfare; economics and business; civil rights and various issues in national and international politics.

PRINCE HALL NO. 41, ORDER OF THE EASTERN STAR PAPERS

The membership of the Order of the Eastern Star (O.E.S.) Prince Hall affiliated chapters are comprised of female relatives of men who are in the Prince Hall Masonry. The Charleston chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star began circa 1912 and is known as Prince Hall Chapter No. 41, Order of the Eastern Star. Noted members of the O.E.S. Charleston chapter include Mamie Garvin Fields,

Wilhelmina Lecque, Lady Loraine Moultrie, Marie Hutchinson (charter member and matron), and Rebecca Garvin. The collection contains meeting minutes, annual reports, correspondence, financial records, organizational bylaws, sashes worn by the women, Eastern Star song lyrics, and some records relating to Prince Hall, Lodge No. 46. Included in the collection are petitions for memberships and women's doctor notes. Other collections processed during this quarter include the Papers of the Lecque Family from the Liberty Hill community in North Charleston, SC and the Humane and Friendly Society Papers.

ACQUISITIONS

Activist-Librarian Ms. Mary S. Miller recently donated her research materials on DeReef Court/Park, which were collected in the quest to preserve and save DeReef Park on Morris Street from real estate development. The collection includes newspaper clippings, correspondence, city council minutes, DeReef family history, and documents from the City of Charleston Planning Commission.

**SAVE
SAVE** **DEREEF
PARK**

PLEASE SIGN THE PETITION URGING
CITY COUNCIL TO HALT PROPOSED
DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR DEREEF PARK



INCREASING AFRICAN-AMERICAN DIVERSITY in ARCHIVES

ONE ARCHIVIST AT A TIME

By Georgette Mayo

In 2006, the Society of American Archivists conducted a groundbreaking series of surveys known as A*CENSUS regarding the state of the archival profession. At the forefront of this report was the issue of diversity, and more importantly, the lack of diverse workforce. As archivist consultant Brenda Banks notes, “achieving diversity remains a major challenge in the twenty-first century.” Overall “there are very few minorities in the profession... the largest identifiable group being African Americans at 28%.”¹

Seeking to change these statistics, The Avery Research Center became one of six host institutions in the United States to partner with The HistoryMakers, the “nation’s largest African-American video oral history archive”, in an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Laura Bush 21st-Century Librarian Grant. The grant’s focus is “Increasing African-American Diversity in Archives”, providing two yearlong fellowships to emerging archivists of color and/or archivists who seek to work with African-American archival collections.

In addition to increasing diversity in the archival profession, the selected IMLS Fellows are equipped to process finding aids using EAD (Encoded Archival Description), the Society of American Archivists’ endorsed descriptive standard for encoding archival finding aids

in Extensible Markup Language (XML). As a host institution with significant African-American collections, it is our desire to facilitate, mentor, and provide an active learning environment in which our IMLS Fellow can grow and flourish in the archival profession.

After a rigorous application and selection process, we are hosting Ms. Aisha Haykal as our first IMLS Fellow. A native of West Valley, New York, Haykal recently graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a Masters in Library and Information Science and a graduate certificate in Community Informatics. Her research interest lies in Community Archives, which she elaborates in an adjoining essay. Ms. Haykal brings her advanced archival technological skills along with a vibrant insight to the realm of archival processing and outreach.

Presently we are preparing for the selection of our second HistoryMakers Fellow. In turn, the Avery Research Center is actively doing its part in training and mentoring a diverse and inclusive archival workforce, one archivist at a time.

¹Brenda Banks. “Part 6. A*CENSUS: Report on Diversity” *American Archivist* (Fall/Winter 2006): 396–406.

There is an ongoing effort to save and preserve DeReef Park, currently an empty lot located on Morris Street in the Cannonborough-Elliottborough section. Nine years ago, the City of Charleston set in motion the Smith-Morris Neighborhood Plan to rezone sections of the Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood from Diverse Residential to Planned Unit Development, allowing developers to build housing units on the DeReef Park lot. Individuals involved in preserving and saving DeReef Park want to see it preserved as a park, as it is the last green-space in the area. DeReef Court and DeReef Park is considered to have been the heart and soul of Charleston’s Black community from the 1820s to 1960s. It is named after Joseph DeReef, a free man of color in the 1860s who owned properties

on DeReef Court, and his brother Richard Edward DeReef. The DeReef brothers were founding members of the Brown Fellowship Society.

Activist Mary S. Miller says she became involved because it appears the “heart of Black culture is being wiped out as if it never existed in Charleston.” One of these places is the Missionary Chapel, located on the same lot and needing renovation. Historically, the Missionary Chapel served as meeting space for African Americans notes Ms. Lois Simms, a lifelong resident of the neighborhood.

Throughout the struggle to save the park, the activists have made strong alliances with individuals and institutions, such as the Avery Research Center and the Preservation Society

of Charleston. Dr. Robert Chase, Avery Research Center’s public historian, contributed to a public hearing on the DeReef Park by offering historical context on the park and its long-standing historic value to the African-American community. Furthermore, the Avery Research Center has assisted in other ways, including providing access to historic documents and helping people work through the issue. Miller’s vision for the park is to “preserve and save it in a manner that is a fitting memorial not only for who [*sic*] the park is named, but for the black persons of prominence who lived in the area.” This may include the installation of a historic marker, a sign, and/or a community center/meeting space.

COMMUNITY ARCHIVES: GOING BEYOND THE REPOSITORY

By Aaisha Haykal

Community Archiving (CA) is not a new concept. Historical societies, individuals, academic institutions, and genealogists (to name a few) have always collected the stories of communities. However, what differentiates community archiving is the community has a central say in how its history is documented. Traditional projects that involve community documentation usually have the “authority” (i.e., the scholar, researcher, academic, etc.) guide the way and establish the ground rules. Community Archiving can happen even when the “authority” has more knowledge about the subject of organizing and describing materials; yet, this “authority” puts the needs, concerns, and the knowledge of the community in the forefront.

The definition of community can be varied; it does not only mean a geographic boundary (street, neighborhood, town), but can also refer to gender, sexuality, race, culture, occupation, religion, organization, and/or corporate affiliation. Thus, when a CA project is developed, the individuals involved must define the scope and content of what they are collecting. Other issues to consider while doing this project are funding, organizational structure, location, collaborators, length of project, etc. A CA project is not something that can begin and/or finish overnight and requires a committed body of people who are willing to organize and collaborate to start and sustain the project.

There are many reasons why a community would decide to undertake an archiving

project. Some of reasons include:

1) to document and record the histories and stories of communities that traditionally have been left out of the historical record (ex. Birmingham (UK)

• Black Oral History Project
www.bbohp.org.uk

• Illinois Youth Media Workshop
will.illinois.edu/youthmediaworkshop

• Chicago Fire Department African-American Fire Fighters Museum (CAAFFM)
chicagoafricanamericanfirefightermuseum.vpweb.com

2) to establish and prove a particular event and/or incident occurred in the community so it is not forgotten by future generation(s). Furthermore, it helps to cultivate community and social memory; and

3) to empower and promote cultural and historical awareness of the achievements and struggles of the community. Moreover, people from outside of the community become more aware of the community’s legacy (this third reason is interrelated to the first two).

One may ask why a community should document itself instead of donating the materials to an archival repository, such as the Avery Research Center. However, if one remembers, the Avery Research Center began as a CA (and still is one)—the Avery Institute of Afro-American History and Culture (AIAAH&C) Committee put out a call for materials that Avery Institute alumni and Charleston’s African-American community answered with donations. In addition, the Avery Research Center staff has worked with communities and organizations to help them preserve and organize their records.

Nevertheless, it is important to note not all

communities have access to safe repositories like the Avery Research Center (meaning, an archive that knows and appreciates the value of the community’s history). Moreover, archives frequently contend with a lack of adequate storage space to hold the stories and records of a particular community. Hence, many archivists who do not want the history to be forgotten and/or destroyed are collaborating with and assisting individuals and organizations to preserve, collect, and describe records for community entities to retain and/or for eventual transfer to a repository when possible.

The benefits of CA for the archive and the archivist(s) include the ability to engage with communities; to educate about preserving the historical record and about archival practices; and for archivists to continue their professional mission of creating a complete representation of society. The role of the archivist(s) in the archiving project can be as involved or uninvolved as the community desires; mostly they are to serve as consultants/advisors.

I invite you to follow my continuing discourse on Community Archives on the Avery Research Center blog — blogs.cofc.edu/averyarchives/.

PROFILES



ROBERT CHASE, PH.D.

Dr. Robert Chase is delighted to join the Avery Research Center as the new Public Historian. Dr. Chase received his M.A. in history from George Mason University and his Ph.D. in history at the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Chase specializes in public history, oral history, civil rights and social justice movements, and African-American history. His dissertation was the recipient of the University of Maryland's E.B. and Jean Smith Prize for best dissertation in political history. His forthcoming manuscript, *Civil Rights on the Cell Block: The Prisoners' Rights Movement and the Construction of the Carceral State, 1945-1990*, explores the roots of twentieth-century prison growth, inmate society and the coercive relationship between keeper and kept, and the legal struggle between inmates and the state over race, prisoners' rights, and questions of citizenship.

While at the Avery Research Center, his role will be to expand the oral history collection, conduct and publish research on civil rights in Charleston, and develop public history programs and historical outreach to the African-American community in Charleston and the Lowcountry.

AAISHA HAYKAL



My interest in archives, and specifically African-American archival collections, developed through my interest in libraries, books, and my limited knowledge about my ethnic and cultural history. I began to realize I wanted to preserve and collect the primary sources on which these books were based. In addition, there were many voices and stories that were, and still are, scarce in written and scholarly record(s), and I wanted to help increase the places and spaces where these voices and stories can be heard and recognized.

Throughout my time at the Avery Research Center, I will process collections, expand upon its social media presence through Facebook and Twitter, investigate the possibilities of mobile technologies to engage African-American history in Charleston, and organize a public programming event to highlight the importance of preserving community memory.



DR. GWENDOLYN BROWN

COMMUNITY PROFILE

By Cynthia McCottry-Smith

Dr. Gwendolyn Brown, "Charleston's gentle dentist", is a native Charlestonian who graduated from Rhett Elementary and Burke High School with honors. She then graduated from the University of South Carolina with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Pharmacy, and the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) with a Doctor of Dental Medicine Degree. Currently, Dr. Brown is a general dentist in private practice at 700 Rutledge Avenue, downtown Charleston, and the Director of Diversity for the College of Dental Medicine at MUSC.

In addition to her association with MUSC, Dr. Brown is a fellow in the American College of Dentists as well as a member of the American Dental Association, The

South Carolina Dental Association, The Coastal District, the National Dental Association, and the Palmetto Medical, Dental, Pharmaceutical Association. She has received numerous awards, including community service awards from Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, various local elementary and high schools, and the Good Apple Award from Channel 5 News in Charleston, South Carolina.

Dr. Brown is married to Mr. Linus Brown and they have two daughters. The family is a member of Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, where Dr. Brown is most proud of mentoring underrepresented students to become dentists.



WE CARRY THESE MEMORIES INSIDE OF WE

Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Art Aesthetic of Filmmaker Julie Dash

By Patricia Williams Lessane, Ph.D.

Twenty years ago, Julie Dash broke new ground in the American film industry when she became the first African-American woman to write, direct, and produce a film that opened with a nationwide release. Dash, who studied film at the University of California at Los Angeles, eschewed American tradition by producing a film replete with lush images of black beauty, sensuality, and Gullah family traditions set against the backdrop of the opulent Lowcountry landscape. Indeed, with *Daughters of the Dust*, Dash offered the country a fresh way to see African Americans.

Set at the turn of the twentieth century, the film chronicles the experiences of the Peasant clan, a Gullah family contemplating migration to the mainland from their home on a fictional sea island. Dash invokes her family legacy and ancestral traditions and employs historical narratives and primary-source materials to develop a comprehensive cinematic depiction of

Gullah life and traditions. Watching the film is in many ways like reading the works of African-American literary icons such as Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker, and the late Paule Marshall. Dash recognizes the visceral ways African-American culture in general and Lowcountry Gullah traditions specifically are influenced by West African and African diasporan historical, cultural, and religious traditions.

A cult classic among African-American artists and academics, *Daughters*, as it is affectionately known by those who love and teach it, continues to be the “go-to” film for professors and researchers of African-American and black studies, black-feminist criticism, film studies, art, and interdisciplinary studies looking for positive, visually stimulating, thought-provoking, and historically accurate portrayals of African-American history and culture.

Told through the voice of an unborn child, the film demonstrates the prominence of religious and cultural syncretism—the

melding of two or more religious or cultural traditions—found within the myriad of African-American traditions at work throughout the United States, particularly the Gullah Sea Islands. Dash situates Gullah traditions—naming rituals, generational rites of passage, and religious practices including Christianity, Islam, and traditional West-African spiritual cosmologies—within a wider discourse of pan-African history and identity. In other words, her characters—Nana Peasant, Eula, Eli, Viola, Yellow Mary, Bilal, Mr. Snead, and the unborn child—represent visible “Africanisms” and cultural nuances inherited from our African, European, and Native-American ancestors as a result of their cultural sharing due to slavery, migration, and international travel and trade.

This Is Not Your Typical Hollywood Black Film

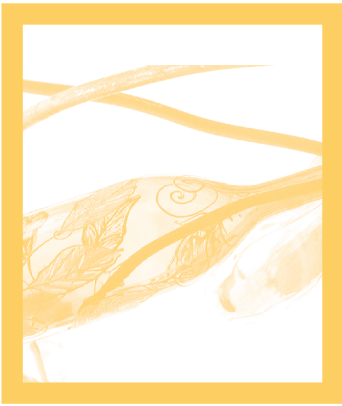
Daughters is not for those looking for a film that glorifies African-American familial dysfunction, violence, drama, or comedic relief. It is both enlightening and entertaining—the iconic cinematography alone is sheer magic, transporting viewers back in time, to and fro between the spiritual and natural realms and then onto the shores of the sea islands. The actors are complex, full-bodied representations of all that is black, beautiful, and complicated. Eula and Eli try to keep their family together through the reality that Eula has been raped by a white man, leaving doubt as to the paternity of the unborn child. There is Viola, the educated but timid granddaughter of Nana, who has shirked the folkways and embraced Christianity as a means of salvation. Perhaps one of the most memorable and controversial characters in the film is Yellow Mary, who returns home with her female lover after years of worldly behavior on the mainland. Struggling to keep the family together are Nana in the natural world and the

unborn child in the spiritual realm. They are inextricably tied together, for, as Nana tells her children, “The ancestors and the womb are one.”

Nana Peazant is the matriarch who passes the family’s history and traditions down to her progeny and beyond, thereby keeping the family together. Like many elders who cleave to folkways and ancestral traditions, Nana draws wisdom from her decades of experience as a mother, wife, and former slave. Unlike her eager and ambitious offspring, she understands the challenges awaiting her family in the North, which will not be “the land of milk and honey” they envision. The heart of the story is the quest for the American dream. Having persevered through decades of subjugation, first as enslaved Africans, then as marginalized “saltwater Negroes” of the Gullah Sea Islands, the Peazant family dreams of opportunity and self-determination, having been disillusioned by the failings of Reconstruction. Now at the turn of the century, with the rise of industrialism, Nana’s children and grandchildren decide to leave their sequestered island home in hopes of finding prosperity.

On September 16 and 17, 2011, the College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center and the Charleston County Public Library celebrated Dash’s accomplishments, the cornerstone of which was a two-day symposium at the Avery Research Center titled “We Carry These Memories Inside of We: Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of *Daughters of the Dust* and The Black Art Aesthetic of Filmmaker Julie Dash.” For two days, scholars, artists, and fans of the film and Dash came together to pay homage to the living legacy of Julie Dash and her work as a filmmaker and writer. It was a great celebration of Black womanhood and sisterhood; and at the end of the symposium, it was clear that all were “Daughters of the Dust”.





THE AVERY RESEARCH CENTER BOTTLE TREE: “A BLESSED MEMORIAL”

By Portia Cobb, Ph.d., Artist and Filmmaker
Associate Professor, Film, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee



The bottle tree is a loaded image. Blue bottles pitched upside down (and sometimes hung) on bare tree branches potentially summon up all the contradictions, anxiety, and emotions about past and present history and the human condition.

By all description, the bottle tree is a protective barrier. The traditional use of its cobalt/indigo blue glass bottle “fruits” are presumed to evoke mystical powers that mesmerize, attract—then trap and ensnarl—negative energy (spirits, ghosts or haints) before they enter the home.



South Carolinians are familiar with images of door and window frames painted blue. This is an old custom—a tradition first practiced by Africans working on indigo plantations in the 18th century.

The bottle tree that now stands at the front entrance of the Avery Research Center was recently installed to commemorate the 20th anniversary of *Daughters of the Dust*, a dramatic film about Gullah/Geechee culture by Julie Dash. For many, this may have been the first sighting of a bottle tree.



Overall, the bottle tree is a *blessed memorial* and is often described as a kind of talisman, amulet, or charm by folklorists and cultural anthropologists. Art historian Dr. Robert Farris-Thompson has traced it to Ba’Kongo (Congo and Angola) visual cultural practices, which also suggests its associative metaphysical defensive and healing attributes that work to neutralize and overpower any negative forces. As we are often captivated by the bottle tree’s splendor, so are other intangible energies.

In my own quest to locate bottle trees and record stories about them, I have discovered



The traditional use of its cobalt/indigo blue glass bottle “fruits” are presumed to evoke mystical powers that mesmerize, attract—then trap and ensnarl—negative energy (spirits, ghosts or haints) before they enter the home.

that for some, they are simply adornments for the yard, the garden, or the land. Some collectors (stewards) acquire fabricated metal trees from garden catalogs or commission artisan blacksmiths to make them. For others, however, they resonate with a respect and love for all things African. As an example, I like to think of indigo artist Arianne King-Comer (responsible for commissioning the vision and installation of the Avery Research Center’s Bottle Tree) as a bottle tree *gifter*. One such recipient of a commission describes the bottle tree as a *blessed memorial* and embraces the connection it has to Gullah/Geechee via Ba’kongo heritage. She remarks that for her, it serves to attract *good* spirits.

A coexistence of African spirituality and Christian faith is commonplace here. Those who profess to fear God also acknowledge a belief in ghosts and spirits, though seemingly detached in their functions. Another steward along Huger Street captures that sentiment with her statement that “Spirits have never been an issue. They are always welcome back home.”

Perhaps the Avery Research Center’s bottle tree will welcome the *good* spirits back home.

WE CARRY THESE MEMORIES INSIDE OF WE: OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

By Curtis J. Franks



The College of Charleston's Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture has been collecting and documenting the history and culture of people of African descent in this area, as well as parts of West and East Africa, for more than twenty-five years. Thus, paying homage to Julie Dash's work, in all of its various manifestations, but particularly *Daughters of the Dust*, vis-à-vis a symposium and juried art show was central to the ongoing work of the Avery Research Center, for it relates to African retentions and survivals. As this all-important work proceeds, and as we could attest and witness during the symposium, "We [do indeed] Carry These Memories Inside of We". As Dash's wonderful work demonstrates, as well as the work of the symposium's presenters, memory can be a powerful and liberating force that liberates and ensnares. Historian David Blight, editor of *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*, notes, "memory is the

cornerstone of our humanity, informing and operating in practical ways; it serves as an ethical and moral compass in our daily lives[...]memory has the power to control us, overwhelm us, or poison us." In essence, we cannot live without memory; and thus, it becomes a matter of how memories are conveyed and by whom. In that regard, the juried art show "We Carry These Memories Inside of We" opened two weeks prior its eponymous symposium to standing room only. It showed twenty-seven thematic works from all over the United States, though most from the Southeast. The four juror selections were as follows: Bernice Mitchell-Tate—*Unspeakable Horrors*, decoupage sculptural collage; Laura Gadson—*The Sepia Grandmother I Never Knew*, quilt; Candace Hunter—*Chlotilde*, collage; Deborah Shedrick—*Daughters*, acrylic on canvas; and special recognition to Addele Sanders for *Gullah Diva* and *Gullah Ladies*, fiber. These works, as well as the majority of those in the exhibition, were effective in evoking powerful memories

artistically and visually. Equally important, the art, like the feature film, considered issues such as gender, modernity versus tradition, and urban versus rural living, just as a few examples. The culminating piece, however, is the Bottle Tree installed on the Avery Research Center's lawn that melds artistic expression with a tribute to the African retentions found within the Lowcountry's Gullah community.

Though my duties left me unable to watch the actual presentations in full, I did hear and experience very positive feedback from participants and attendees. Therefore, it stands to reason that by all accounts, "We Carry These Memories Inside of We" (symposium and juried art show) was a rousing success, marking a watershed moment in the Avery Research Center's continued work under the direction of Dr. Patricia Williams Lessane.

WORD SHOUT SONG

Lorenzo Dow Turner Connecting Communities Through Language

By Patricia Williams Lessane, Ph.D.

Bringing “Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner Connecting Communities Through Language”, a world-class exhibit developed by The Smithsonian Institution’s Anacostia Community Museum, to the Charleston area has been a labor of love. Last summer, Michael Allen of The National Park Service approached several of us in the community about working to bring this amazing exhibit to the Lowcountry. Each of us sat enthralled by the idea of hosting this amazing exhibit about an exemplary scholar and educator for our constituents. However, it was not going to be easy. With a hefty price tag in front of us, Michael and I recognized we needed to enlist the help of major “heavies” to accomplish this feat, and that we did. We approached Dr. John Fleming, Executive Director of the City of Charleston’s International African American Museum, about partnering with us; and Evie Nadel, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Community Relations, to help us garner support from President Benson here at The College of Charleston. With the encouragement and financial support of Dr. Benson and Mayor Joseph P. Riley—our very own “heavies”—and other generous sponsors, we were able to raise the needed funds to secure the exhibit and mount public programs.

This collective work has been nothing short of magical and miraculous, for it was just last June that Ricardo Williams, a native of Johns Island and longtime Smithsonian Institution staffer, sat down with Mike Allen, me, and several other representatives from the community to discuss his vision for bringing this important exhibit to the Lowcountry. I had not seen the exhibit yet, but reviewing the specs and hearing Ricardo’s fervor and passion about this project jazzed us all.

When I finally saw the exhibit in August, I was inspired by the legacy of a great American scholar whose high academic achievements, research training, and cultural acumen advanced our understanding of Gullah culture and dialect, and the transatlantic interconnections between West Africa—namely Nigeria—with Salvador do Bahia, Brazil, and our very own Lowcountry Gullah culture. Working in the 1930s and 1940s, Turner examined not only the diversity of African diasporan identity and culture, but also the cultural, linguistic, and religious syncretism that took place vis-à-vis the 400 years of cultural sharing between enslaved Africans, their European captors, and indigenous

Africanisms in the GULLAH DIALECT

Lorenzo D. Turner

American populations. Furthermore, Turner and this exhibit exemplify one of The College of Charleston’s guiding tenets, namely that of the importance of place in American history and culture, and its importance in African Americana.

Working to bring this exhibit to Charleston has a certain element of kismet for me as there are so many similarities between Dr. Turner and me: he taught at Fisk University, I graduated from Fisk; he taught at Roosevelt College, now Roosevelt University, I taught at Roosevelt University;

“This collective work has been nothing short of magical and miraculous...”

he conducted fieldwork on Candomblé in Salvador do Bahia, and I conducted my doctoral fieldwork in Salvador on the same subject. Yet more importantly, this project has been a rewarding experience, and I fervently hope school-age children, college students, tourists, and our community of lifelong learners visit the exhibit.

EVERY RESEARCH CENTER PUBLIC AND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

By Robert Chase, Ph.D.

The Avery Research Center announces a new public and oral history project that will broaden our collections and connections to Charleston and the Lowcountry's African-American community. We aim to develop new oral histories and expand our collection in the areas of civil rights and Black Power; Black studies, education, and the arts; African-American work and labor; urban histories of African Americans in Charleston, particularly as it relates to community displacement and the loss of African-American urban spaces; African-American and Gullah culture; and histories of African-American women, families, and struggles over gender.

In the coming year, we will be conducting three major oral history efforts. In coordination with the John L. Dart Library, we will conduct a series of oral histories with patrons and community members for Dart Library's commemoration of the

founding of Dart Hall as a unique social, cultural, and education space for African Americans. This new oral history project on African-American collective communities is titled "The House that Dart Built: Legacy, Library and Community." In coordination with the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), we are also conducting a series of oral histories with former African-American students who attended MUSC during the years 1969–1975. This joint project aims to record the experiences of African-American students and graduates of MUSC in the years immediately after the racial integration of the university. As part of our effort to reach a new generation of Avery Research Center supporters, I and *HistoryMaker* Fellow Aisha Haykal will spearhead an oral history project with African-American youth. Finally, as part of our upcoming conference on Black Power in the twentieth century and beyond,

we will begin the process of collecting oral histories on Black Power in Charleston and the Lowcountry, particularly as it relates to Black Studies, education, mass incarceration, police brutality, and the "Orangeburg Massacre" of 1968, during which nine South Carolina Highway Patrol officers shot into a crowd protesting the segregation of a bowling alley—resulting in twenty-eight injured protestors and three dead. Our efforts in all of these areas will be ongoing in 2012 and beyond, as we link the Avery Research Center's rich archival collections to a vibrant local history that directly speaks to emerging historical discussions and debates over civil rights, Black Power and politics, and African-American identity in the twentieth century.



EVERY INSTITUTE MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Pamela Zaresk, Membership Chairman



Hopefully, since you received your last issue of *The Avery Messenger*, you've been to the Avery Research Center for our annual meeting in June; attended the two-day symposium or other events associated with Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* in September; or maybe just stopped in to see what's going on!

I don't want you to miss out on the benefits of your Avery Institute membership. Annual dues for the new year were due in January and hopefully you have renewed; but if not, why not go ahead and send them in right now? Use the envelope enclosed with this issue of *The Avery Messenger*. And,

while you're at it, why not consider giving a membership to someone as a gift? In addition to assuring you receive *The Avery Messenger* (always good reading), your membership gets you notified of and invited to events at the Avery Research Center. I've never attended anything at the Avery Research Center that hasn't been enlightening, thought provoking, and fun (you meet the nicest people).

The Avery Institute Board of Directors is committed to assisting the College of Charleston's Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture in its ongoing mission to add to its collections and share not

only with the academia, but with the community at large. To that end, we're doing our best to make assure that our membership list is up to date and accurate. We want to ensure our loyal members get notices and information but we don't want to be wasteful by spending money on postage to send correspondence to non-members. So don't run the risk of being dropped from the membership list because you forgot to send in your annual membership dues.

AVERY INSTITUTE MEMBERSHIP

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CALL FOR PAPERS AND PANELS

THE FIRE EVERY TIME

Reframing Black Power across the Twentieth Century and Beyond

In the Fall of 2012, the Avery Research Center will host a public history symposium, dialogue, and community event examining the Black Power Movement in the twentieth century and beyond.

Generally typecast as radical, violent, and ultimately self-defeating, the Black Power Movement has been considered by some as an aberration of the Civil Rights

Movement. Still, others have viewed it as a destructive interruption and a politically ineffectual movement that derailed the civil rights agenda, resulting in white backlash, conservative retrenchment, and urban unrest.

Recent scholarship, however, has begun to rethink the meaning, geographical placement, periodization, and effect of "Black Power", revealing deep historical roots

in black communities and a profound and far more positive legacy than previously indicated. This conference will bring together activists, scholars, and students to review and discuss the Black Power Movement, its manifestations, and continuing impact.