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The Moorland



A NEWSLETTER OF THE MOORLAND-SPINGARN RESEARCH CENTER

LIBRARY DIVISION

CHRISTINA VORTIA
APPOINTED MSRC CHIEF
LIBRARIAN

PENN CENTER HOSTS “TIED TO THE LAND”

A SYMPOSIUM ON THE
PRESERVATION OF
LOWCOUNTRY AND GULLAH
GEECHEE HISTORY AND
CULTURE

MSRC AT 50 SYMPOSIUM

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE MOORLAND-
SPINGARN RESEARCH
CENTER

WRITTEN & EDITED BY: REBECCA HAYNESWORTH

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NEWLY APPOINTED CHIEF LIBRARIAN

Christina Vortia

Library Division

November 2023

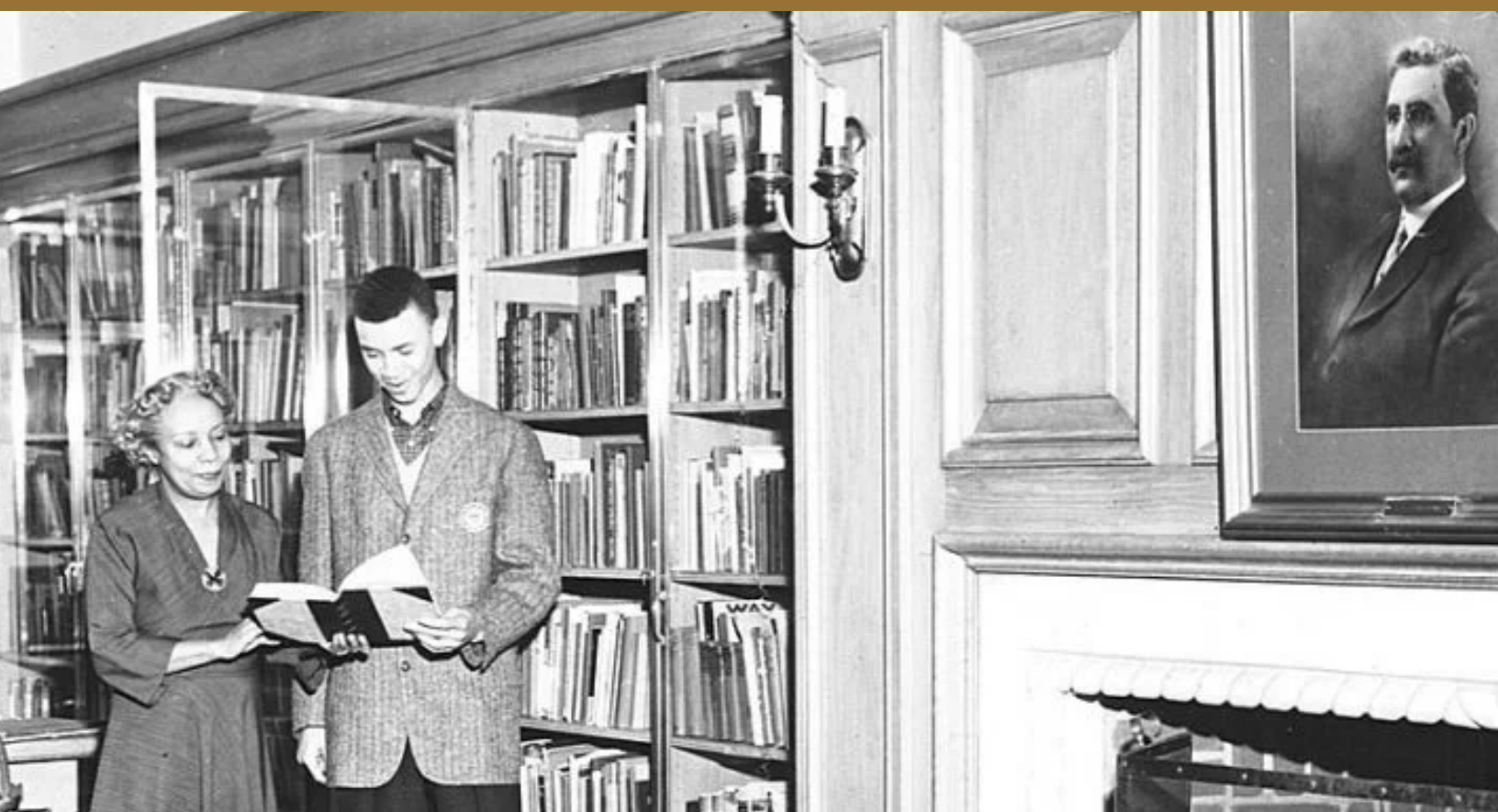


Newly Appointed MSRC Chief Librarian Christina Vortia photographed in the MSRC Reading Room

The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center is proud to announce the appointment of Rare Books Librarian Christina Vortia to MSRC Chief Librarian. *The Moorland* sat down with her early this month to discuss her journey to Moorland-Spingarn and her transition into Chief Librarian.

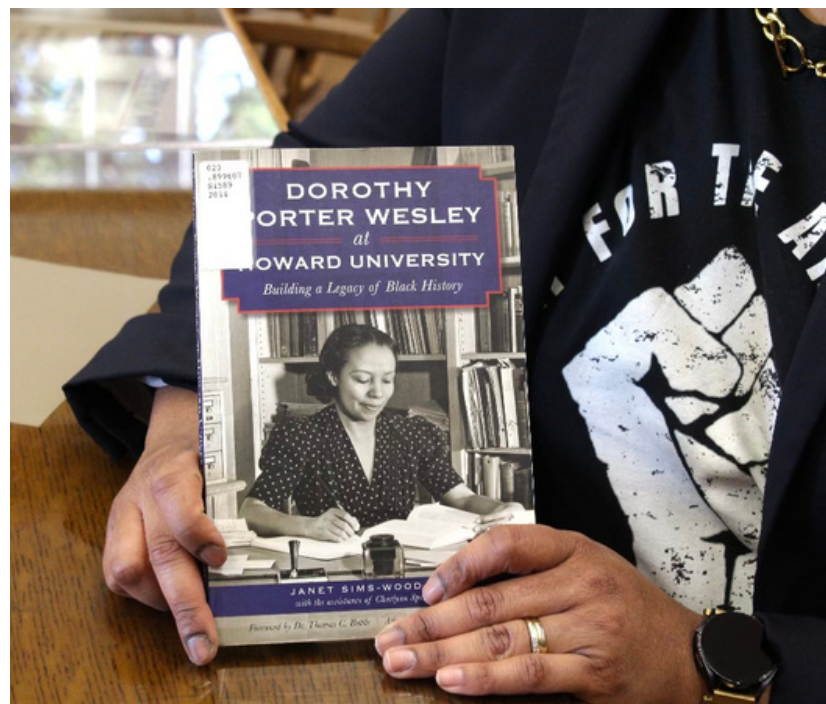
Christina's journey of service in libraries began when she was eleven. She recalls her mother volunteering her to work in the public library to "learn how to be organized." Since then, she has become a renaissance librarian working in almost every kind of library in every type of role. Christina's journey to Howard University began on the campus of Tuskegee University, more than 20 years ago. At Tuskegee, she became friends with Moorland's former Chief Librarian, Sam Johnson. She says that "he strongly encouraged me to come to Howard as the Rare Books Librarian of the MSRC, which has taken me into the literary adventure of a lifetime."

The MSRC Chief Librarian's role is the memory keeper of the most precious antiquarian literature of the known Black world. The role also exists as the heartbeat of the historic Reading Room. In this role, one walks in the literal footsteps of Dr. Dorothy Porter-Wesley. Christina comes into the role in the aftermath of great transition, and says that she "welcomes the opportunity to dial up our efforts on preservation and conservation." The Chief Librarian's role is particularly important as anti-racist librarians, historians, and archivists battle on the frontlines of "alternative truth".



Beginning in 1914, the Library Division is foundational to the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center and predates even the Founders Library. Inside the Library Division collection is abolitionist Lewis Tappan's personal book collection, a first edition copy of Ida B. Wells' *The Red Record*, books from Daniel Murray's 1900 Paris Exposition, the most extensive collection of Afro-Latino literature in the world, first edition copies of books from the 19th century written by Black women around the world and so much more.

When asked about the future of the Library Division, Christina shared that “the Division is at the intersection of access and preservation, and that preserving the collection is essential. We have everything to gain by prioritizing book and paper conservation and everything to lose through lack of support and negligence.” Much of the library’s collection is not searchable online, and one of her goals is to change that. As we went over some of the future goals for the Library Division she concluded by saying, “I also want to collaborate with organizations, community partners, and the wider Howard community to bring dynamic programming that captures the majesty of the collection.”

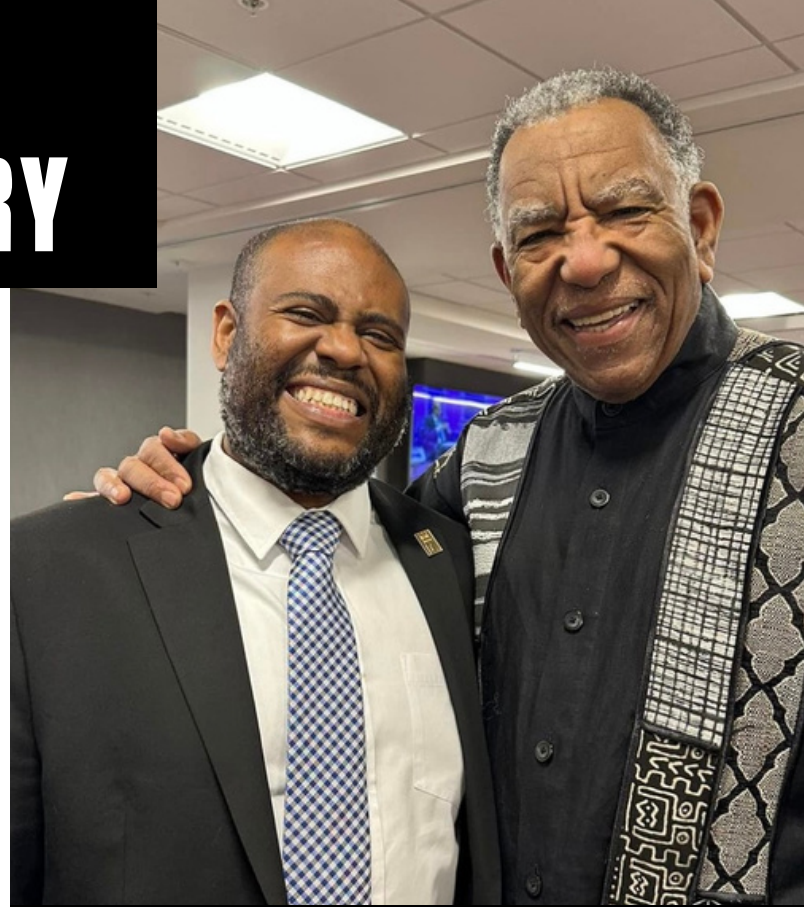


Christina Vortia holding *Dorothy Porter Wesley at Howard University Building a Legacy of Black History*, by Janet Sims-Wood



CELEBRATING OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center 50th Year Symposium was a celebration of MSRC as a world class archival institution. The event was held on November 15, 2023 in the Howard University Undergraduate Library's Multi-Purpose Room. For founding Director Dr. Michael R. Winston, the symposium was like "rewinding a memory tape from his best years at the University." MSRC welcomed home its former directors and staff, including Dr. Thomas Battle, Dr. Janet Sims-Wood, Paul Coates and Dr. Clifford Muse, in a historic conversation moderated by Senior Publications and Communications Specialist, Teddy Abebe. MSRC's current University Archivist, Ms. Sonja Woods also participated in the panel discussion. Current MSRC students and staff flocked to event from their offices within the stacks to hear some of their predecessor's most memorable and gratifying Moorland Moments. The event also attracted a mixed group of undergraduate and graduate students who had either only recently learned of the extraordinary collection housed at Moorland or deeply respected MSRC as one of the world's most comprehensive repositories on the history African people. The affair truly illuminated the great significance of our 50th anniversary and the expansive history of Moorland-Spingarn from a collection to an institutional repository.



Dr. Lopez D. Matthews, Former MSRC Digital Production's Manager & Paul Coates, Former MSRC Manuscripts Librarian





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MSRC Staff 1988 in MSRC Reading Room

50 YEARS OF 1ST CLASS RESEARCH ASSISTANCE

Before Moorland-Spingarn was a Research Center, it was already considered "the largest and most valuable research library in America for the study of Negro life and history." According to Dorothy Porter, Moorland-Spingarn's purpose could be captured in four different ways. The first is to accumulate, record and preserve material by and about the Negro. The second is to assist interested students of Negro life to pursue the scholarly exploitation of the material in the collection. Third, is to instill race pride and race consciousness in Negro youth. Finally, it is to provide a great reference library on every phase of Negro life. In 1932 the Moorland Foundation was designated as a research library, and over the next forty-three years, with Dorothy Porter leading the efforts, Moorland was transformed into a modern research library that served the needs of the academic and international community of intellectuals.

in 1964 Dr. Winston was appointed as Assistant Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and the Director of Research in the Department of History. Nine years later, under President James E. Cheek, the university appointed him to oversee and manage the Moorland-Spingarn Collection, then called The Moorland Foundation, a Library of Negro Life. His appointment as director came during the retirement of Dorothy Porter, a very monumental time for the organization. President Cheek and the university's board of trustees, in preparation for her retirement, determined that Moorland could operate at its fullest potential as a separate as its own administrative entity. This executive decision led to the creation of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, which included the existing Jesse E. Moorland and Arthur B. Spingarn Collections, the Howard University Museum, the Howard University Archives, the Black Press Archives and the Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection (previously the Civil Rights Documentation Project).



Looking back on the time of his appointment, Dr. Winston recalled that "in institutional terms it was the expansion of Howard University's evolving capacity as a contributor to research in a variety of fields". He noted this mile marker as being "important not only for Howard and its various constituencies in the United States and internationally, but as a marker of its evolution from being primarily a teaching institution providing sorely needed professionals in a wide range of fields, to peer status with American research universities". During his tenure as director, Dr. Winston led the reorganization of MSRC's administrative structure, the renovation of facilities, the expansion of staff members, and program development.



In 1970 the Ford Foundation awarded Moorland a grant which allowed for the creation of a Manuscripts Division and the hiring of trained experts in the field of manuscripts and archival management. The new Division was divided into four departments: Manuscript, Music, Oral History, and Prints and Photographs. This new edition to MSRC solidified the center as a hub of primary documentation that informed the necessary areas of journalism, law, medicine, the arts, education, and social activism. As founding curator of the Manuscript Division Dr. Thomas Battle said, "Celebrating a half century of such focused effort is an important reminder of its [MSRC's] significance in the face of new assaults upon the integrity of history and its documentation of the experiences of peoples of African descent." Dr. Battle was hired as a reference desk librarian in 1972, under Dorothy Porter. As Dr. Battle shared, "The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center has served as a bastion of knowledge during its long history as a resource for historians and other scholars. Its role as a repository of knowledge is as important as ever during the current ongoing search for historical accuracy that influences much of our educational content in academic institutions throughout the nation."



The creation of MSRC also brought to life the Howard University Museum, a project which had been dormant since the late 1930's. The museum was a communal educational resource available for the university, public schools in the area, and the general community to view visual documentation of global African history and culture. Functioning as MSRC's most vital Division, the Library Division has since blossomed from a few books to an iconic collection encompassing and reflecting the fluidity of the experiences of Africans around the world. In its foundational years, the Division received the literary collection and papers of alumnus C. Glen Carrington, which would become second only to the Spingarn Collection in its size and breadth.

For half a century, MSRC has been an essential institution for the study and documentation of African life. In the celebration and reflection of our great past, new life was poured into the Center and paths towards the future were charted. Dr. Winston described the fiftieth anniversary as "an opportunity for the current MSRC staff to connect with predecessor staff and to share information and mutual endeavors, something of independent value. Finally for those of us who returned to the Center many years after our initial service it was a chance to reminisce as well as witness both exciting innovations and gratifying continuations."

The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center would like thank all who were in attendance of the MSRC 50 Symposium. Cheers to 50 years!



SOCIAL SCIENCES
READING ROOM

MOORLAND - SPINGARN
MANUSCRIPT DIVISION

HOWARD UNIVERS
ARCHIVES

LIBRARY
SERVICES

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MSRC Director Dr. Michael Winston meets with VIPs, March 1976(L-R) Dr. Michael Winston, Bernard Dadie, Dr. Leon Damas.



The MSRC Technical Services Department staff, April 1983 (L-R). Tomasha Hall, Ruth Li, Roland Scott, Emma Johnson, Loretta Poke, Ethel Ellis.

MSRC Curator of Manuscript Dr. Thomas Battle and Manuscript staff member Denise Gletten reviewing documents, ca. 1978.





MSRC staff members attending Denise Harbin farewell reception, June 27, 1980 (L-R, Front Row). Mary Lumpkin, Agnes Williams, Cheryl-Ann Hopkinson, Esme Bhan, Karen Jefferson, Dr. Thomas Battle, Betty McFadden, Denise Harbin, Wilda Willis-Logan, Diana Corney, Monica Beckles, Ruth Li, Bessie Fowler, Unknown; (L-R, Back Row): Millie Baker, Tomasha Hall, Charlynn Spencer-Pyne, Cornelia Stokes, Glenn Phillips, Greta Wilson, Unknown, Maricia Bracey, Scott Baker, Henry Miller, Unknown, Dr. Janet Sims-Wood, Helen Binion, Kathy Jenkins, Theodore Gaffney, Loretta Poke.



MSRC staff members and visitors attending MSRC retirement party, June 27, 1991 (L-R) Dr. Thomas Battle, Dr. Ann Randall, Dr. Dorothy Porter Wesley, Dr. Elinor Sinnette, Karen Jefferson, Dr. Doris Hull, Dr. Michael Winston.

Howard students during research in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center Reading Room, 1979-1980 (Foreground: MSRC staff Betty Culpepper sitting at desk and Sterling Hughes standing).

50 Years of Perseverance

Teddy Abebe has helped lead the efforts on the year long commemoration of the 50th anniversary of MSRC. Early this year, in partnership with WHUT (Howard University Television), MSRC recorded *A Conversation With Dr. Michael R. Winston: Historian & Storyteller*. In the three part production, Mr. Abebe interviewed founding MSRC Director, Dr. Michael R. Winston. We sat down with The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center's Senior Publications and Communications Specialist to gather his thoughts on the 50th anniversary of MSRC, and here is what he had to say.



1. CAN YOU SPEAK TO THE IMPORTANCE AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM?

The 50th anniversary is a significant milestone because it is, in my opinion, a testament to MSRC's importance and resilience through the decades. Fifty years of service to the global research community has made exceptional contributions to all types of publications and productions in every field of human endeavor. Numerous scholarly, literary, and media outputs have used and benefited from MSRC resources. The resources continue to provide unique historical perspectives and credible contents to researchers. Overall, the special event highlighted the great reputation MSRC built through its dedicated staff and extraordinary holdings.

2. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY WAS THE THEME OF THE ANNIVERSARY EVENT?

For me, the theme is perseverance. MSRC went through many obstacles during the five decades of its existence. I sincerely hope and trust that MSRC will continue to overcome challenges and register many more successes to reach its centennial anniversary.

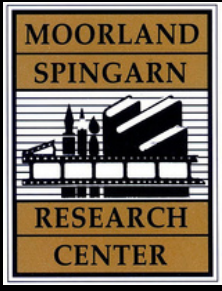


3. WHAT WAS IT LIKE MODERATING THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN PAST DIRECTORS AND STAFF MEMBERS?

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It was a joy and honor to serve as the moderator. The discussion, in my view, was a continuation of my conversation with Dr. Winston which was recorded and produced recently as part of MSRC's fiftieth anniversary. As one who served MSRC as Assistant Archivist and Senior Archivist for a long time, I had the opportunity to acquire knowledge about the research center and Howard University. I also had the opportunity to know and work with many professionals who are currently either retired or working at other institutions. The combination of knowledge and experience, I think, provided me with the skills necessary to lead such a discussion. Having the founding director (Dr. Winston), his successor (Dr. Battle), and the man who built the University Archives and also served as MSRC's interim/associate director (Dr. Muse) on the panel was very special. Of course, the great rapport that I built with each of them has been instrumental in the success of past and present collaborative efforts. That is the reason why I managed the discussion, including the Winston interview, effectively. I must acknowledge our current director, Dr. Benjamin Talton, for his full support and inspiring initiatives that are rebuilding and energizing MSRC and its important work.

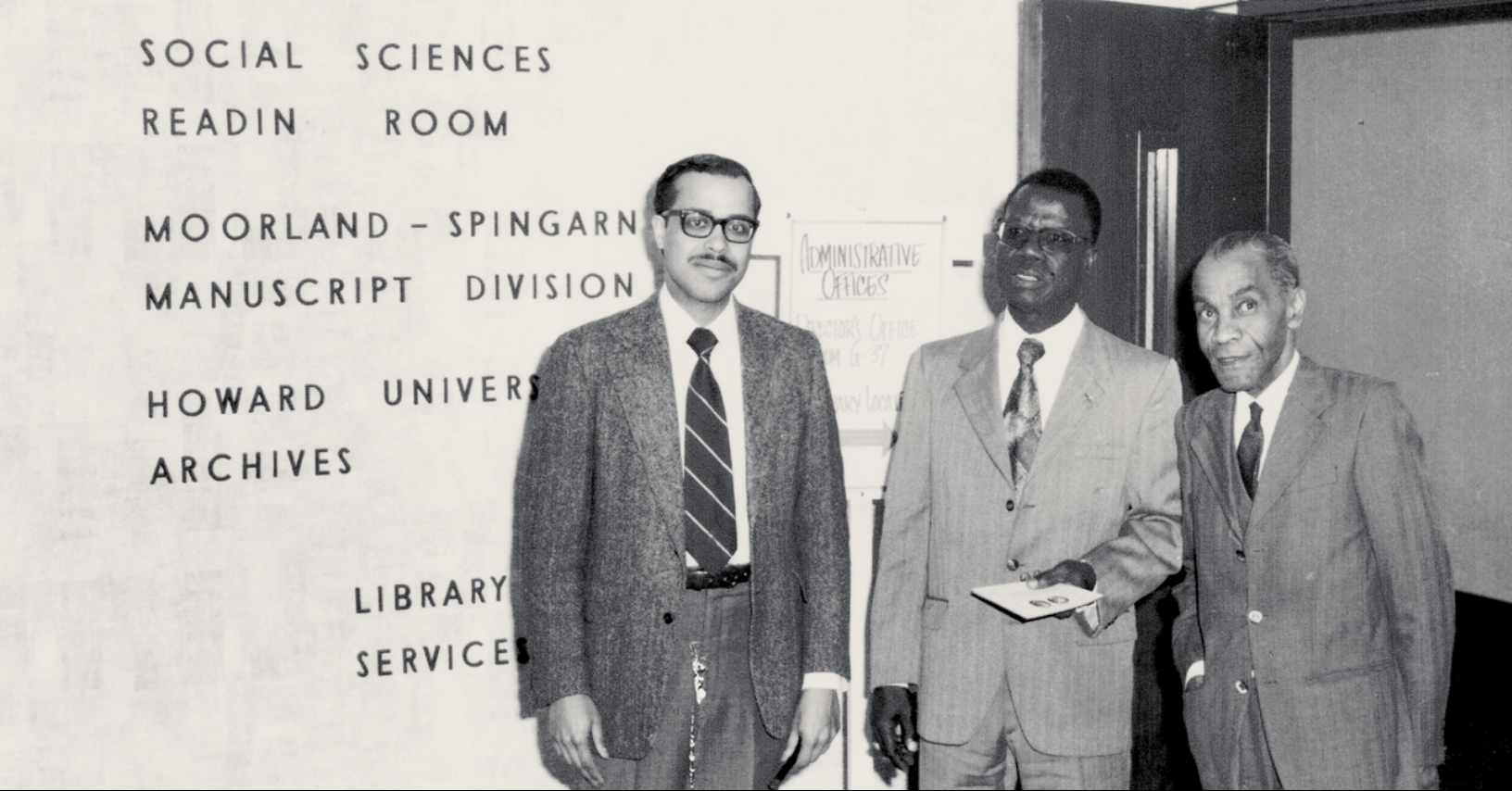




The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

Preserving the Legacy of the Global Black Experience Since 1914

MSRC AT 50



A CONVERSATION WITH DR. MICHAEL R. WINSTON: HISTORIAN & STORYTELLER PART TWO

STREAM PARTS ONE & TWO ON OUR MSRC TV YOUTUBE CHANNEL

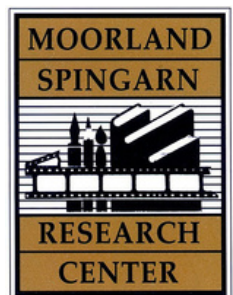


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IN THE LEGACY OF PRESERVATION

**A MSRC
SPOTLIGHT**



THE PENN CENTER

16 PENN CENTER CIRCLE WEST

ST. HELENA ISLAND, SC 29920



When discussing the national model for preservation of Southern African-American culture, the Penn Center undoubtedly must be at the very center. As the original site of the Penn School, which was founded in 1862, it has played a major role in the promotion and conservation of Gullah Geechee culture in South Carolina for nearly two centuries. With the motto "Education for Freedom", Penn was one of the first recognized schools for emancipated Africans in the South following the American Civil War. Providing educational and technical provisions that encouraged self-sufficiency and communal advancement, Penn helped nurture and refine some of the finest minds across Beaufort County and the Sea Islands of South Carolina. In early November the Penn Center held its 39th Annual Heritage Days Celebration. The festival honored the educational legacy of the center and the West and Central African cultural legacy of the region. As we enter a crucial time of protecting the history of our people in this country and globally, The Moorland followed MSRC Director Dr. Benjamin Talton as he ventured to one of the region's largest Black celebrations commemorating a national monument.



On November 10th and 11th, MSRC Director Dr. Benjamin Talton participated in the Penn Center's Heritage Days Festival in St. Helena Island, South Carolina. This three-day event is dedicated annually to celebrating and educating the public on the history, culture, and current challenges of the Gullah Geechee communities of the Sea Islands of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Dr. Talton was a speaker a symposium on the theme "Tied to the Land." He and other participants addressed issues related to the land displacement experienced by Gullah Geechee and other communities of African descent through gentrification, unjust tax policies, tourism development, and various iterations of exploitation. In addition to Dr. Talton, the panel included representatives from the Avery Center, Morehouse College, Claflin University, and the University of Georgia.





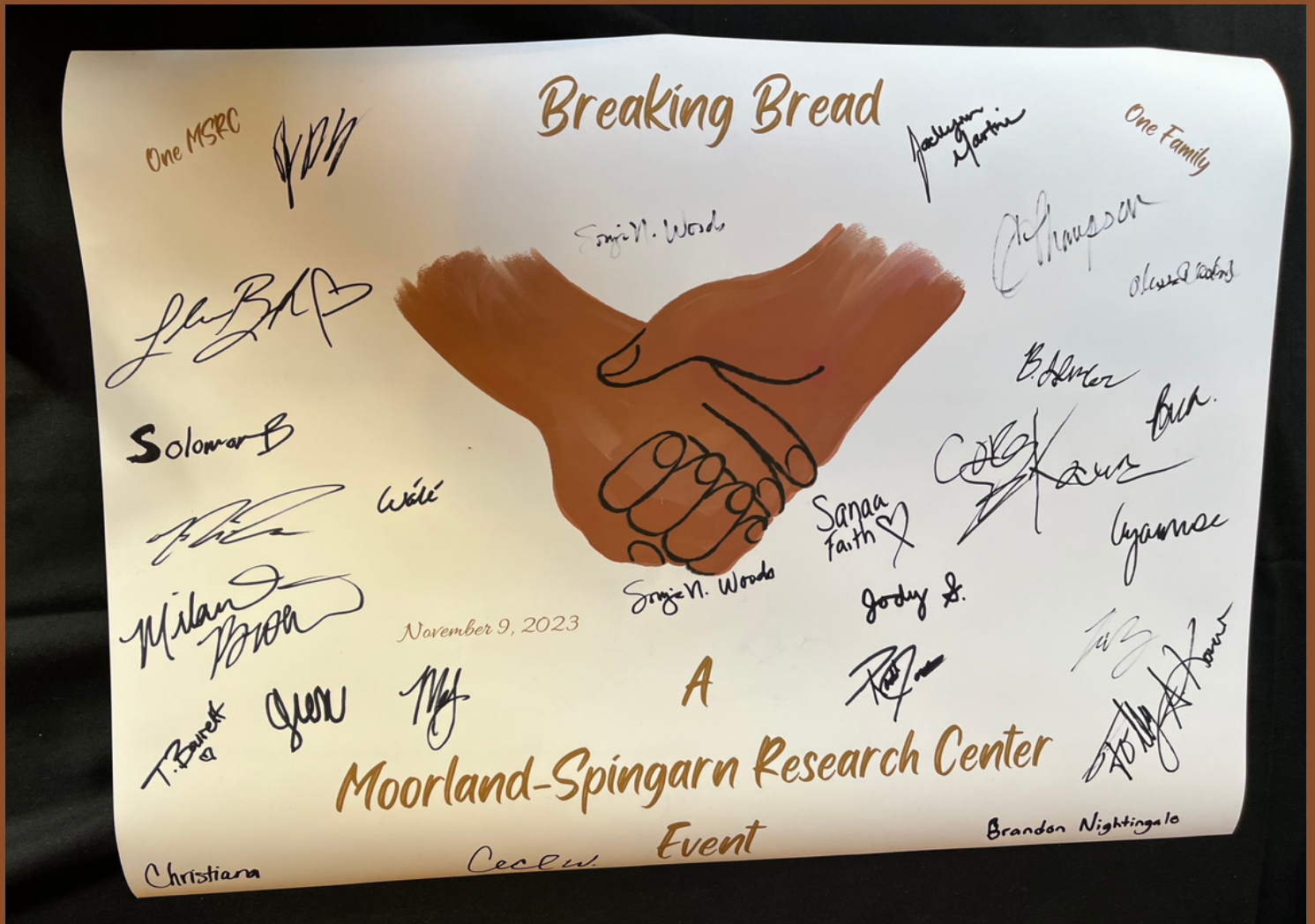
Dorothy Porter Wesley and Former HU President, James E. Cheek, at Howard University Museum Opening

Dorothy Porter Wesley spent her career at Howard University as not only a librarian, but a master antiquarian. After being appointed in 1930, she spent 43 years collecting both national and international documents, literature, and materials relating to Black people. Her extensive work is ultimately responsible for the development of The Moorland Spingarn Research Center, and our massive collection. Wesley dedicated her life's work to increasing the Black Student's curiosity and interest about their African inheritance.

In honor of the late Dr. Dorothy Porter Wesley, in each publication of "The Moorland" we will feature institutions at the local, national, and international levels that remain instrumental in the process of preserving the history of African people. We encourage readers to visit these hubs of ancestral knowledge that still operate, whether they may be in our hometowns or where family members may reside. It is our social responsibility to sustain Our historical institutions that have been and are still playing a fundamental role in the transmission of historical and cultural relevancies to subsequent generations. We hope you enjoy this new addition to our periodical. We also welcome you to share with us any pictures you may take upon your visit to these sites.

MOORLAND LUNCH

ORGANIZED BY THE MSRC PARTY PLANNING COMMITTEE



WORDS FROM THE PARTY PLANNING COMMITTEE

“ **LOVELACE BOAFO** ”

I decided to be a part of the party planning committee because I find great satisfaction in organizing events that bring happiness to others and contribute to a stronger sense of community. In the workplace, it's crucial to establish a work culture that allows individuals to find genuine enjoyment in their tasks, this then alleviates any stress or pressure associated with work. I firmly believe in the importance of creating a sense of community.

"Breaking Bread" allows us to share a meal with each other and creates an environment where trust, confidence, and comfort can flourish. Our recent "Breaking Bread" event was particularly meaningful as it provided MSRC scholars and staff with an opportunity to unwind and connect on a personal level outside of our typical work routine. I am hopeful that this event has sparked the beginning of new connections and friendships within our MSRC community.

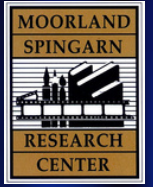
“ **BRANDON NIGHTINGALE** ”

The party planning committee is an important part of MSRC as it helps us plan and organize events. We are responsible for organizing various events, such as birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and many more. When I came to MSRC, I thought Dr. Talton wanted to have parties for the end of the semester, but this was a difficult task for just one person. The committee does a great job of including everyone and making sure each division in MSRC has a voice. The Committee is instrumental in helping MSRC staff organize their personal life in a better way, improve the culture of the office, create space for the internal organization of social gatherings, promote and develop the organization, and ultimately responsible for providing the best possible party facilities.



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SAVE THE DATE



2024
September 24th– 26th
**The International
Black Writers Festival**
The Moorland–Spingarn Research Center



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