

The USF Africana Heritage Project: Rediscovering Records of African American Genealogy and History

The Project

In February of 2004, the Africana Studies Department launched the USF Africana Heritage Project. The project's mission is to rediscover records that document the names and lives of slaves, freedpersons and their descendants, and make that information available on our free Internet site at www.africanaheritage.com.

The project grew out of ongoing research by Dr. Deborah Plant's students, and is now nationally recognized as a resource center for learning about African American history and genealogy. Since the project website went live in March 2004, more than 67,000 visitors have logged on to enjoy the information and services the site offers.

How do We Conduct Our Research?

Documents such as wills, deeds, bills of sale, runaway slave advertisements, plantation journals, church records, early voter registration lists, more name slaves and associated slaveholders, and reveal much information about the history of slavery and the African American experience. There's lots of information, it simply isn't "out there" where researchers can find it.

That's where the USF Africana Heritage Project comes in. The project's volunteers inventory USF's library holdings and public documents to gather records that collectively document the African American experience. Since February 2004, the project has placed more than 2,000 individual documents online that name slaves and freedpersons, for those who are tracing African American ancestry.

On the Internet and in the Community

The USF Africana Heritage website offers articles, features and services to help put resources in researchers' hands. The Eleanor's Links page contains an exhaustive list of links to Internet resources that document the African American experience. The Share Family Stories page is a place where readers can record, preserve and share family oral history. Volunteer Christine Fortner offers the Ask Christine service, where researchers can receive personal assistance with tough research problems. The Cemetery Preservation page offers help and advice for preserving historic African American cemeteries. "Online Archives We Love, and Why" is a compendium of links to archives and research collections available online. The Teacher's Idea Bank offers links to free lesson plans on African American history and culture, cultural diversity and prejudice. The site's searchable database offers access to documents, photo images and sound recordings.

The project also produces original research articles. Dr. Plant's students have researched and transcribed plantation records from USF's microfilm holdings, including the account book of Charleston slave trader Alonzo White. An upcoming article will feature the account book of Richmond slave trader Silas Omohundro.

Within the local community, Africana Heritage is involved in ongoing oral history interviews to document the history of Florida's earliest free communities and African American cemeteries. We need volunteers to help conduct oral history interviews at upcoming town hall meetings in Hillsborough and Pasco counties. If you would like to volunteer, please visit the Africana Studies department in FAO 270 or drop us an e-mail at info@africanaheritage.com. We cherish our volunteers!

