

Up-and-Comers: News for Student and New Archivists

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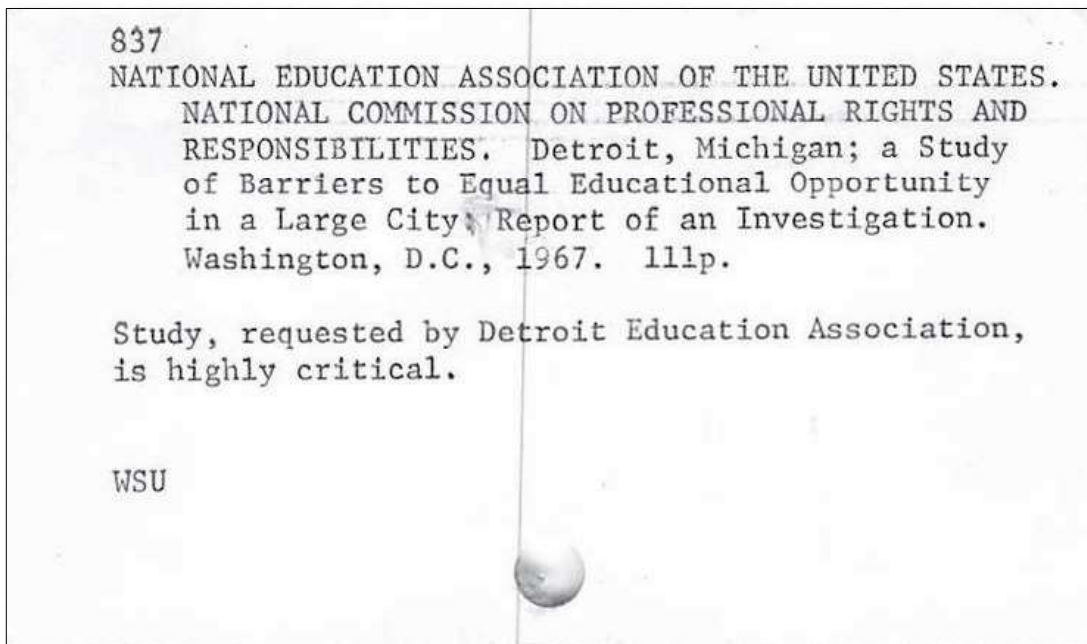
Meet Taylor Gibson, 2020 MLS Graduate, Wayne State University

In April of 2020, I graduated with my master's degree in library and information science at Wayne State University, and I will finish my archive certificate this summer. Before starting my graduate work, I saw myself working in big institutions within my community, such as the Detroit Institution of Arts or The Henry Ford Museum. However, by the end of my degree, I found myself more passionate about being a part of a smaller narrative of the community. I am now focusing my work toward marginalized communities with resources that have the potential to be forgotten. I was able to be part of an archives project called the Michigan Black History Bibliography Project that changed my perspective on the importance of smaller collections.

The Michigan Black History Bibliography (MBHB) was created in the 1970s by Roberta McBride, a librarian at the Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University. McBride pulled together resources from various institutions and publications that tell the story of African American history within the state of Michigan. This resource covers three centuries of Michigan history with topics including slavery in Detroit in the 1700s, Underground Railroad activity in the 1800s, and racism and discrimination in the 1900s.

The current project began in 2017 when Dr. Louis Jones, field archivist at the Reuther Library, approached the Wayne State University Society of American Archivists (SAA) Student Chapter about the bibliography. Jones suggested a digitization project culminating in digital access to the resource from anywhere. The student chapter devised a plan to scan the bibliographic notecards, enter the data from Excel spreadsheets, and upload them into Omeka.

Two Wayne State students, Mattie Dugan and Alexandria Penn, serve as the project leaders. Dugan played an integral part in starting the project and the digitization effort. After each index card was scanned, it was uploaded to Google Drive for the next step in the project. The Wayne State SAA Student Chapter recruited volunteers to enter the information on the digitized notecards into an Excel spreadsheet. A total of 16 students and alumni contributed to this project. Alexandria Penn worked to bring volunteers into the project and create metadata standards for them to follow. This allowed students to practice the skills they learned in class and apply them to a digital project.



Digitized index card from the Michigan Black History Bibliography Project

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I was the practicum student hired to analyze the metadata to ensure the accuracy of the information taken from the index cards before uploading into Omeka. My review turned up numerous spelling mistakes and issues with the metadata field entries. Some of these issues stemmed from having multiple students at varying places in the program work on the project. Not all of the volunteers had worked with a Dublin Core metadata schema, causing inconsistencies in the data they input into the fields.

After correcting the data, each item had to be researched to link its index card to the physical document to allow researchers to find the resources easily while using the bibliography. Lauren Kennedy, graduate of the Wayne State MLIS program, conducted most of this research. She used OCLC (Online Computing Library Center) as the research platform to locate the items. Abbreviations for institutions where the items are located, such as “WSU” for Wayne State University, appeared on half of the index cards. For items that listed an institution and that could be in OCLC, Kennedy added a link to the resource. For any item without a location or that could not be located at

the one listed, she listed the closest institution to Wayne State University. The entries for the items were listed.

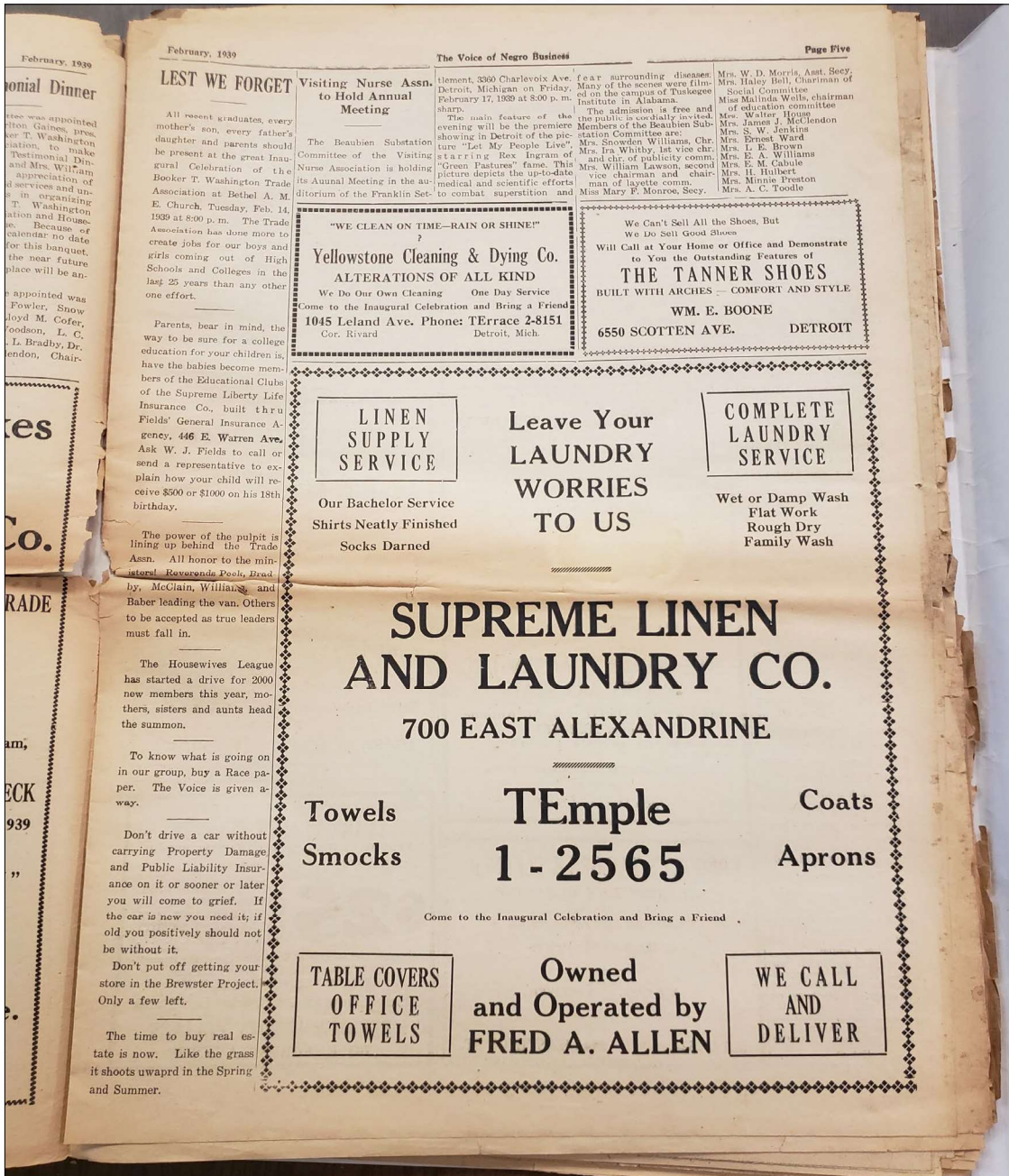
The next task for the project was to upload all the data into Omeka and add images to each item. Alexandra Penn and I worked on this to ensure the information transferred into Omeka correctly. After an initial test with the first couple of items, we decided to try uploading 100 items at a time. The Excel sheets created previously were converted to a .csv document for transfer. One issue that did come up in the uploading was that items with an ellipse, “...”, in the data would duplicate the record. Items that successfully uploaded then had subject tags and images added. As each item was processed, it was made publicly available on the site.

The resource intends to help researchers discover the African American experience in Michigan and especially in Detroit. The collection’s research value was the main reason that Dr. Louis Jones wanted to make the bibliography publicly available. Even before the bibliography went online, it helped researchers locate resources that would have been extremely difficult to find without it.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Michigan Black History Bibliography. At the top left, the title "MICHIGAN BLACK HISTORY BIBLIOGRAPHY" is displayed in large, blue, sans-serif font. To the right of the title is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon. Below the title is a navigation menu with four tabs: "Browse Items", "About", "Team Members", and "Tips for Using the Bibliography". The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a "FEATURED ITEM" section with the title "The Detroit Riot of July 1967: a Psychological, Social and Economic Profile of 500 Arrestees." Below the title is a small image of a document page with text, and to its right is a short summary: "Interview results of arrestees made ten days after Riots started, showed more than half were over twenty-five, some 85% had some high school...". The right column features a "RECENTLY ADDED ITEMS" section. It lists two items: "The Grim Facts (a Survey of a Few of the Instances of Violence against the Negro People as Reported in the Press): Michigan" with a summary: "Summarizes several instances of violence, some growing out of the Sojourner Truth Riots." and "The Walkout: A Symptom of Dying Inner City Schools" with a summary: "Principal of Northern High Freedom School describes background of the 1966 walkout."

Currently, I am working with my colleague Alexandria Penn to aid her PhD research on mapping Detroit's Black-owned businesses from the 1930s through 1950s as advertised in *Voice of Negro Business*, a newspaper produced by the Housewives League of Detroit and the Booker T. Washington Trade Association. The Housewives League was originally founded in 1933 to encourage African American housewives to patronize African American-owned businesses. The map showcases thriving Black

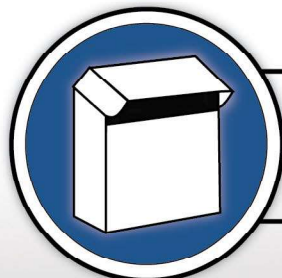
businesses located in Detroit communities such as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. These communities were destroyed in the name of urban renewal when the government characterized them as "slums." The map data can contradict the original justification for the destruction of these communities. This is an ongoing project, but as the metadata is entered, the businesses will appear online through Arch GIS StoryMaps.



Page from the *Voice of Negro Business* newspaper (Credit: Allie Penn)

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The organizations and projects that I have played a part in often reflect the disparities that current movements are striving to eliminate from our society. With the Black Lives Matter movement and subsequent groups in Detroit like “Detroit Will Breathe,” I see an important part of history taking place. The anger and injustice these groups are protesting interweave in the narratives of both the Michigan Black History Bibliography Project and Mapping Detroit Black-Owned Businesses. During my final semester in the program, I am working with the Detroit Sound Conservancy (DSC) as its archive fellow. DSC is a nonprofit, community-based music archive documenting Detroit’s collective history through preservation, education, performance, and place-keeping. I hope that by working with organizations such as DSC, I can empower the communities in Detroit that have long been forgotten.



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