

Archival Resources on the Web

Assistant Editor: Lauren White, University of Michigan. Contact Lauren at laurenashleywhite@gmail.com if you would like to guest author a column or have a good idea to share.

Chicago Public Library Publishes Five New Digital Collections on Black History

By Johanna Russ and Beverly Cook, Chicago Public Library Archives and Special Collections

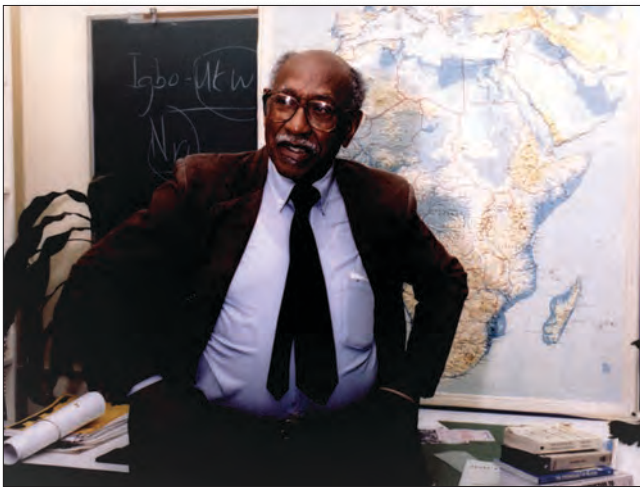
Chicago Public Library's Archives and Special Collections Division is pleased to announce the publication of five new digital collections related to Black history in 2021 (<https://www.chipublic.org/digital-collections>).

Timuel D. Black Jr. Digital Collection

<https://www.chipublic.org/timuel-d-black-jr-digital-collection>

The world lost a great oral history griot and humanitarian on October 13, 2021. Tim was just two months shy of reaching 103 years young. We will miss his passion, his empathy, his knowledge, and his willingness to be a leader and teacher for social justice.

A true Renaissance man, Timuel D. Black Jr. was a gifted educator, activist, historian, and citizen of Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood and the globe. His vast knowledge, not just of history, but also of Black life and politics in Chicago, means he routinely spoke at gatherings both large and small. This digital collection contains speeches that span nearly four decades from the 1960s to the 1990s. Topics range from education, civil rights, racial discrimination, and segregation to Chicago politics and voting rights.



Timuel Black at Loop College (now Harold Washington College), early 1980s

Alongside his speeches, we present letters written by Black to his brother, Walter Black, while each was

serving in the armed forces during World War II. Black began his army career in 1943 with the 308th Quartermaster Railhead Company. The company was a "forward supply unit" that aided in the D-Day Invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. On display are the beginnings of Black's unrelenting commitment to Black civil rights and an equal and just society for all.

The original versions of these speeches and letters, as well as other correspondence and materials, are housed in the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection at Woodson Regional Library. The Timuel Black Jr. Papers comprise 336 linear feet and document Chicago history from the early 20th century to the 21st century, as well as the groundwork for effective community organizing.

Chicago Department of Urban Renewal Photographic Negatives Digital Collection

<https://www.chipublic.org/chicago-department-of-urban-renewal-records-photographic-negatives-digital-collection>

"Urban renewal" was the name given to the widespread and controversial practice of tearing down older residences and buildings to replace them with newer development in cities around the United States from the 1950s to the 1970s. While citizens occasionally benefited from these changes, they were often displaced due to the changing landscapes. Communities of color were especially hard hit by urban renewal, or, as James Baldwin called it, "Negro Removal."

The nearly 16,000 photographic negatives in this digital collection illustrate urban renewal in Chicago in its positive, negative, and mundane lights. Captured are properties before they were torn down or rehabilitated—both exteriors and interiors—as well as new construction in progress and completed. New development resulted in shopping centers and high-rise housing, university and medical campus expansions, public art installations, and rehabilitated homes. The images document most parts of Chicago, and they also show the people who lived in the neighborhoods, the public officials who spearheaded the projects, and much more.



Sidewalk construction, West Polk Street, undated. Chicago Department of Urban Renewal Records.

The Special Collections Unit at Harold Washington Library Center holds the Chicago Department of Urban Renewal Records, 41 linear feet that include additional images, documents, and publications not visible in the digital collection. The nearly 16,000 photographic negatives were difficult to access due to their format. This digital collection was made possible through generous funding from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation.

Harold Washington: Selected Speeches Digital Collection

<https://www.chipublib.org/harold-washington-speeches-digital-collection>

Harold Washington was the first Black mayor of Chicago, elected in 1983. Born in Chicago in 1922, Washington served in the military during World War II before completing a law degree at Northwestern University. His first elected office was as an Illinois state representative in 1965. He went on to serve in the Illinois State Senate and the U.S. Congress before becoming mayor of Chicago. Washington died November 25, 1987, just a few months into his second term as mayor.

Harold Washington was a gifted orator and spoke at many public and private events, especially during his mayoral administration, 1983–1987. While audio recordings of his speeches are scarce, many of the original scripts survive. Mayor Washington and his press office carefully crafted his speeches to convey his political goals to his audience and to drum up support.

Washington used his speeches to explain to the press and public what was going on in City Council and to bring attention to his administration's achievements. Washington spoke at many important events, such as the annual State of the City address, the US Conference of Mayors, neighborhood forums, and high school and college commencements.

Topics covered are wide ranging, including city budgets, antigang initiatives, Black history, racial discrimination, economics, housing, and transportation. While most of the speeches focus on issues related to Chicago or Illinois, this collection also contains a number of speeches delivered to audiences across the country as Washington campaigned for the Democratic nominees in the 1984 presidential election.

This digital collection allows for full-text searching of 285 transcripts, making these speeches more accessible than ever before. The original speech scripts in this digital collection, as well as other speech scripts and related records, are housed in the Special Collections Unit at Harold Washington Library Center.

George Cleveland Hall Branch Digital Collection

<https://www.chipublib.org/george-cleveland-hall-branch-digital-collection>

The George Cleveland Hall Branch Archives contains materials related to the operation of Chicago Public Library's Hall Branch, opened in 1932. The branch is named after prominent Black physician, activist, and leader Dr. George Cleveland Hall. The Hall Branch Archives contains annual reports, branch bulletins, programs, flyers, and memos from 1932 through the 1970s. The majority of objects displayed were created during the tenure of branch head Vivian G. Harsh. Harsh is well remembered, not just as CPL's first Black branch head, but for her dedication to social outreach and the study of history and literature.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Hall Branch became a magnet for Chicago's Black writers, artists, scholars, and the general public. Harsh launched the Book Review and Lecture Forum, a semimonthly event designed to bring library patrons together with speakers on topics in Black history, literature, and current events. Harsh cultivated an impressive constellation of Black presenters, including Richard Wright, Langston

(Continued on page 22)

ARCHIVAL RESOURCES ON THE WEB—Continued

Lauren White, Assistant Editor

(Continued from page 21)

Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Horace Cayton, William Attaway, Alain Locke, and St. Clair Drake.

The Chicago Public Library George Cleveland Hall Branch Archives are housed in the Vivian G. Harsh Collection of Afro-American History and Literature at Woodson Regional Library. This digital collection contains over 147 items that highlight the development and administration of the George Cleveland Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library and the birth of the Black Chicago Renaissance. This digital collection is made possible by a generous Illinois History-Digital Imaging Grant (awarded in 2018) from the Illinois State Library, Office of the Illinois Secretary of State.

Illinois Writers Project: “Negro in Illinois” Digital Collection

<https://www.chipublib.org/illinois-writers-project-negro-in-illinois-digital-collection>

The Illinois Writers Project: “Negro in Illinois” Papers contain research notes, transcripts, oral histories, and original manuscripts intended to present a history of Black Americans in Illinois from roughly the late 18th century to the early 20th century.

As part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, the Illinois Writers Project, within the Works Progress Administration, created a special division with more than a hundred researchers tasked with documenting the Black experience in Illinois from 1779 to 1942. Poet Arna Bontemps and writer Jack Conroy supervised the study. Among the notables who participated were Richard Wright, Fenton Johnson, Kitty Chapelle, and Robert Lucas. These authors became leading figures in the Black Chicago Renaissance.

Topics included enslavement of Black people, abolition, religion, politics, sports, social life, music, theater, and art. Destined to be published in book form with the title *The Negro in Illinois*, the research ended when the government canceled the project in 1942. Chicago Public Library’s first Black branch head, Vivian G. Harsh, agreed to house a large portion of the research in her “Special Negro Collection” at CPL’s George Cleveland Hall Branch.

The Illinois Writers Project: “Negro in Illinois” Papers are housed in the Vivian G. Harsh Collection of

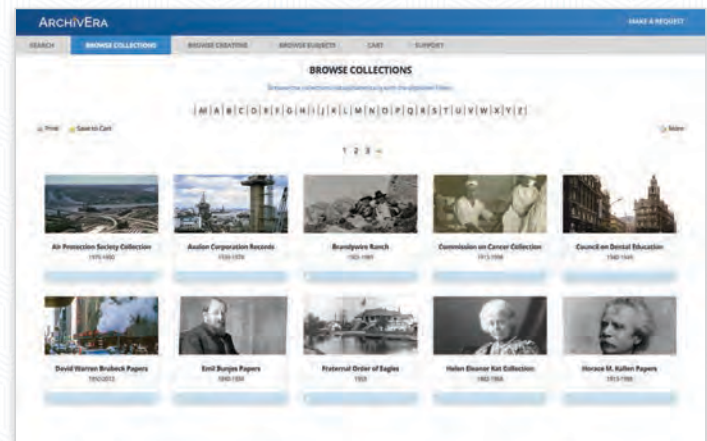
Afro-American History and Literature at Woodson Regional Library. This digital collection is made possible by a generous Illinois History-Digital Imaging Grant (awarded in 2018) from the Illinois State Library, Office of the Illinois Secretary of State.

Want to Know More?

Contact us with questions at Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, harshcollection@chipublib.org, 312-745-2080, Special Collections and Preservation Unit, specoll@chipublib.org, 312-747-4884.

 LUCIDEA

ARCHIVERA
Archival Collections Management Software



Solves today’s archives collections management challenges, ready for tomorrow’s

Engaging · Imaginative · Immersive
Innovative · Essential · Unrivaled

WE INVITE YOU TO REQUEST A FREE DEMO TODAY!

www.lucidea.com/archivera