Preserving Los Angeles African American History

Through the generosity of a number of visionary donors, the UCLA Library has acquired six important collections documenting African American history in Los Angeles. These collections will enhance the Library’s existing holdings related to the African American legacy in Southern California.


Gordon (1908-2012) began collecting and taking photos after opening a law practice in the mid-1930s. A gift of Judge Beverly, Gordon’s photos offer a vibrant record of successful African Americans enjoying economic, social, and political achievement amid pervasive racial segregation and discrimination.

The Houston Papers document this Los Angeles native’s career as CEO of Golden State Mutual Insurance Company and one of Ebony magazine’s most influential African Americans. They also record his family history, including his father’s and his own service in the U.S. Army during the First and Second World Wars.

Educator Dorothy Vena Johnson, social worker Juanita Miller, and poet Langston Hughes founded the League of Allied Arts in Los Angeles in 1939 to support African American artists and art students. The collection includes financial and institutional records, photographs, and event-related ephemera.

Matthews (1905-2003) was the city’s first professionally trained African American librarian. Believed to be the most extensive photo archive documenting African American history in Los Angeles, her collection includes some 4,600 items from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries.
Growing up in Hong Kong and immigrating to the United States after high school, May Chong credits her Chinese background with shaping her personal philosophy of living a balanced and simple life. However, it was the education she received at UCLA, she says, that “opened up my mind, helped me grow my career, and enriched my life.”

After earning her bachelor’s degree in economics from UCLA, May received her first job offer as an executive trainee at Bank of America through a campus interview. After being a banker for many years, she found her real interest in private wealth management and is currently a financial advisor at Merrill Lynch.

May has recently directed a generous gift to the UCLA Library to establish a collection endowment in the Richard C. Rudolph East Asian Library. The materials purchased through the fund will feature both Chinese and English with side-by-side translations to make the learning process easier for students whose native language may not be Chinese but who are interested in Chinese language and culture as well as native Chinese speakers who are learning English.

May feels very fortunate and thankful to have been exposed to and nourished by both Chinese and American cultures, and her background has allowed her the opportunity to see things differently. She feels that while there were times that she might have been torn between two cultures, the benefits have far outweighed the frustrations. “There are always two sides of everything; it all depends on your attitude,” she notes, about finding balance. “Different people with different backgrounds can live harmoniously together if they are willing to understand one other and keep open minds.”

May spent a lot of time in libraries during her early years, so after she became a UCLA student, it was second nature for her to visit the library frequently. In essence, it became her “home away from home.” “The East Asian Library was the only place that made me less homesick,” she recalls. “In the library, I was able to read the same newspapers, magazines, and books from my home country. It became the strongest spiritual and intellectual link to where I came from.”

Now she sees that the East Asian Library has a larger, more expanded role. She would like to see it grow into a cultural and educational resource for both Chinese and non-Chinese-speaking people who are interested in Chinese language, teachings, and cultures. She hopes that the library can provide the platform for other students like her, who have never lived outside of their native countries and may feel isolated due to a lack of understanding of Western culture, to learn new customs and values that will allow them to adapt and grow in a new environment.

It is May’s wish that, through a better mutual understanding of each other’s cultures, the relationship between China and America will become more harmonious. The bookplates that will be included in each item purchased through her collection endowment feature the word “和.” In concert with May’s expectation of the world and human relationships, when this Chinese character is combined with another, it suggests both “harmony” (和諧) and “peace” (和平).
Dear Friends and Supporters of the UCLA Library:

As I reflect upon my eventful past decade at the UCLA Library, I am amazed by our anticipation of and adaptation to the ever-changing needs of twenty-first-century students, faculty, and researchers. Creating an environment containing resources, services, and facilities to fully support their wide variety of learning, teaching, and research has been the guiding principle behind the Library’s strategic plan, leading to a number of remarkable achievements.

Collections have always been at the Library’s heart, providing the fuel that our research university runs on. Ten years ago we had 7.5 million volumes and some fifteen thousand electronic titles, while today we have topped ten million volumes and four hundred thousand electronic resources. Many of these acquisitions have been made possible by generous donations of essential funding or invaluable gifts-in-kind.

As the library for a public university, we actively steward our collections in the public’s interest, making them as broadly accessible as possible. To that end, our Digital Library projects have increased from a handful in 2003 to nearly one hundred today, with thousands of unique photos, books, documents, and oral histories available online. We also now inform and assist graduate students and faculty with peer-reviewed open access alternatives to traditional scholarly journals, bringing their research to reach wider audiences, which stimulates economic growth and new discoveries.

Several initiatives encourage and reward use of Library materials. The UCLA Library Prize for Undergraduate Research inspires and rewards outstanding library research by undergraduate students. And the Library’s Center for Primary Research and Training provides graduate students with a substantive educational and training experience in special collections, during which many center students have identified thesis or dissertation topics.

The UCLA Library is re-imagining its collections and services for students in support of learning and for faculty in support of instruction. Teaching and Learning Services is developing a four-year service model that fosters undergraduate engagement in UCLA’s scholarly community and beyond, preparing students for success in a complex and challenging global environment.

We have also re-imagined library facilities. Renovated spaces in the Charles E. Young Research Library have brought more than twice the previous number of visitors to use the flexible, technology-enabled research commons, group study rooms, and conference center. Study commons have been created in the Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library and Science and Engineering Library, offering collaborative spaces supported by technological capabilities.

Though this particular chapter in my leadership role as UCLA university librarian is nearing its end, I take great pride in these and countless other accomplishments and in the strong and capable staff we’ve built and nurtured. I thank you for your generous support of our efforts – we quite literally couldn’t have done it without you!

Gary E. Strong
University Librarian

From the University Librarian

If you would like to make a gift in honor of University Librarian Gary E. Strong on the occasion of his retirement, please visit <http://giving.ucla.edu/librarian>.

Giving Opportunities

The UCLA Library Associates

Support from the UCLA Library Associates ensures that critical needs, from special-opportunity acquisitions to information literacy programs, are addressed. Discretionary funds available to the university librarian will make a significant impact on the quality, innovative resources and services that the UCLA Library is able to offer.

Honor with Books

Honor with Books allows donors to pay tribute to a special person by placing a bookplate in his or her honor in a newly purchased book in the subject area of the donor’s choice. This $100 gift supports a critical acquisitions need while honoring a loved one, friend, special teacher, or colleague in perpetuity.

Collection Endowment Initiative

The Collection Endowment Initiative provides critically needed funds to acquire, preserve, and make accessible library materials in a particular subject area of interest. Collection endowments begin at $40,000, and the Library invites donors to make a single gift or to build an endowed fund over several years. Special bookplates reflecting the interests of the philanthropist are designed in consultation with the donor and affixed to each item added to Library collections that was made possible by his or her generosity.

Making a Bequest

In writing a will or living trust, donors can specify that they would like their estate to benefit the UCLA Library. In recognition of alumni, friends, faculty, and staff who have chosen to benefit the university through planned giving, they are welcomed as members of the prestigious First Century Society. Planned gifts include gifts through wills, living trusts, charitable trusts, charitable gift annuities, retirement plans, or other estate planning arrangements.

If you would like to receive more information about these or other options to support the UCLA Library, please contact Amy Drizhal, director of UCLA Library Development, by telephone at 310.206.8551 or by email at adrizhal@library.ucla.edu. Or visit the Web site at <http://www.library.ucla.edu/development>.
Champagne Reception

This past spring, University Librarian Gary E. Strong hosted the UCLA Library’s annual champagne reception, which honors Library donors and showcases acquisitions made possible with donor gifts received during the previous year. The event was held into the newly renovated spaces of the Charles E. Young Research Library, with recent acquisitions displayed throughout the expansive, glass-enclosed reading room.