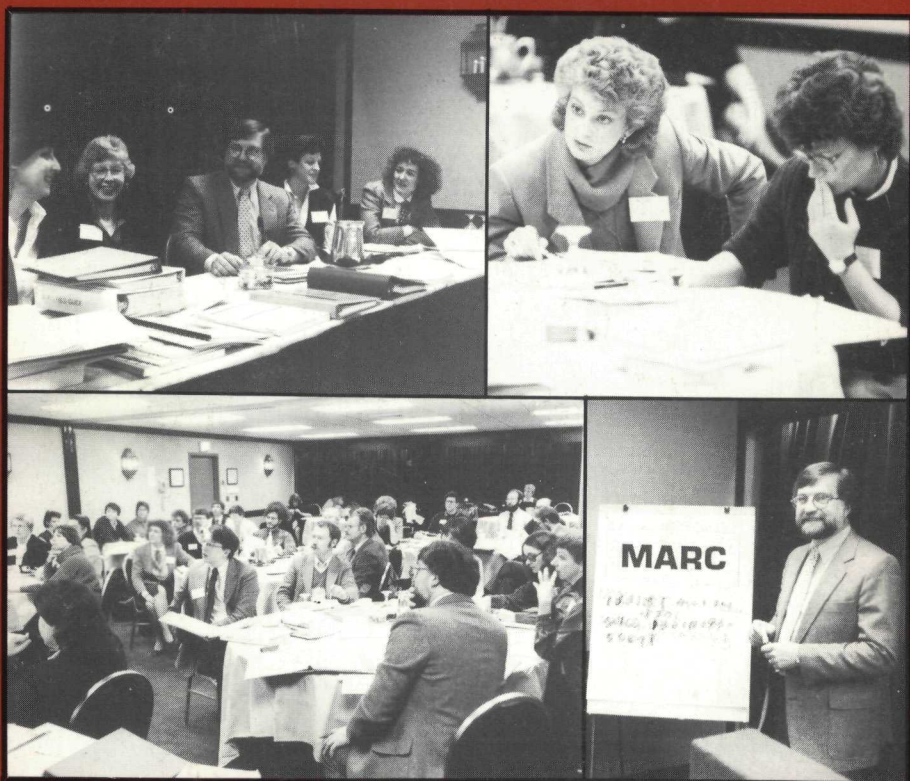


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The Forum

TO THE EDITOR:

As Jacqueline Goggin described in her article, "Carter G. Woodson and the Collection of Source Materials for Afro-American History," Woodson collected primary source material from his perspective as historian, scholar, and editor of Afro-American studies. Archivists since Woodson have not found it any easier to collect black history. Potential donors are often unaware of the importance of material they possess, and too often there is simply a dearth of material.

The Black History Research Project at the University of Missouri-St. Louis experienced many of the same trials that Woodson did. The project began with a one-year grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and had a staff of three people. It made valuable contacts in the community, targeted the individuals and institutions it wanted to collect, and publicized the project through lectures, radio and television appearances, brochures, and slide shows. All material collected was deposited in the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at UMSL. Unable to get funding after its first year, the university agreed to fund the project with a staff of only one person, who has other campus and community

responsibilities. In 1984 the project was disbanded.

The project collected less than 25 linear feet of material. However, this small collection has quickly become the most important source for doing St. Louis black history. For almost every researcher it has been the collection as a whole, the aggregate of single items which by themselves may never have been preserved, that has been the most helpful. There are only a few significant collections that document one person's life. As a former manuscript specialist, and a researcher in the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, I learned to appraise black history sources more critically. Every document made the Black History Research Project Collection more important. The sum of what was collected was indeed more valuable than its individual parts.

The experience in St. Louis echoes Woodson's. Considering Woodson's contributions to preserving source materials on Afro-American history, he should be made an honorary archivist, albeit posthumously.

PATRICIA L. ADAMS
Archivist
Saint Louis Art Museum