



Smithsonian

*National Museum of African American
History and Culture*

News

Media only: James Gordon (202) 633-0095 or gordonj@si.edu
LaFleur Paysour (202) 633-4761 or paysourf@si.edu

June 16, 2008

Public only: (202) 633-1000

Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture Seeks "Treasures" in Los Angeles July 12

The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture will host a daylong program in Los Angeles to help the public identify and preserve items of historical and cultural significance tucked away in the attics, closets and basements of their homes. In collaboration with the Japanese American National Museum and the California African American Museum, the day will feature presentations, hands-on activities and preservation tips.

Up to 200 people can reserve in advance to bring up to three personal items to the event for a 20-minute, one-on-one professional consultation with experts on how to care for the items. The specialists will serve as reviewers, not appraisers, and will not determine items' monetary values. Objects such as books, paper and textiles no larger than a shopping bag (furniture, carpets and paintings are excluded) can be reviewed. Those wishing to have items reviewed must make reservations online at rsypnmaahc.si.edu or by telephone at 1- 888-249-8033. Reservations are not required for those not wishing a one-on-one consultation. Additional information is available at www.nmaahc.si.edu.

The event will be held **Saturday July 12, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**, at the Japanese American National Museum, located at 369 East First Street, Los Angeles. Free and open to the public, the event is the second in a series called "Save Our African American Treasures: A National Collections Initiative of Discovery and Preservation."

More than 150 people brought in family objects to the first "Treasures" event held in Chicago in January. In the crowd was Patricia Heaston of Chicago, who brought a white Pullman porter cap and a gold colored pin bearing the image of an African American woman. She learned that the white Pullman porter cap was rare (most caps were black or blue), and its color meant that its owner had

SI-280-2008

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION MRC 509 PO Box 37012 Washington DC 20013-7012 Telephone 202.633.4751 Fax 202.633.8788

tended to prominent travelers (perhaps even presidents) on a private train car. The image on the pin was that of Madame C.J. Walker (1867-1919), the first African American female self-made millionaire. The pin was probably given as a prize to successful sales agents of Ms. Walker's hair-care products.

Future events will be held in Atlanta, New York and Washington, D.C. in Sept. 2008. All have been made possible by a grant from the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, which gave \$1 million to the museum for the "Treasures" program and for the pre-design and construction of the museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. scheduled to open 2015.

"Bank of America has long been a supporter of the arts and culture, and it is truly fitting that we continue to help preserve history by bringing the "Save Our African American Treasures" workshop into our communities," said Leticia Aguilar, Bank of America's Los Angeles market president. "I encourage Angelinos to become aware of the important role they can play in safeguarding family mementos and treasures for other generations to enjoy."

"We must encourage private citizens to become aware of what they have," said Lonnie G. Bunch III, founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, "to protect it, and to preserve it so the story of the African American in this country can be told. Private citizens knowingly or unknowingly hold the 19th-and 20th-century objects in their basements and attics, everyday items—family photographs, military uniforms, farm tools, decorative items, and wedding dresses—that can help tell this story for future generations. If we don't act now to preserve these items, the tangible evidence of a critical component of American history will be lost.

"The Japanese American National Museum supports the 'Save Our African American Treasures' series," stated Akemi Kikumura Yano, Chief Executive Officer, Japanese American National Museum. "Our institution understands the challenges to preserve our collective American history. Within our community, many personal family items were lost during World War II. That made the task of finding those precious objects very difficult, yet they still were in the hands of many families who were unsure of the historic value of their possessions."

Experts from the California African American Museum also will be on hand to evaluate items brought in for review.

"The California African American Museum has received many notable donations over the years," stated Executive Director Charmaine Jefferson. "Too often, such items are easily discarded without an understanding of how they might tell a story. We welcome this opportunity to work with

our partners to help save treasures and to show individuals how to preserve and protect within their own homes the legacies and living history of their own families for generations to come.”

The “Treasures” program includes the following sessions:

- **Hands on Preservation:** Participants are invited to learn how to properly store letters, pack garments, and prepare photographs for preservation storage and presentation.
- **Preservation Classrooms:** Three informal basic preservation sessions will take place during the day. One will focus on textiles, a category that includes cloth dolls, flags, hats, clothing, lace, quilts, needlework and table linens. The session on photographs and paper will inform participants on simple inexpensive techniques to keep their family Bibles, historic pictures, and important documents such as diplomas and wedding licenses safe from deterioration. The final session of the day explains to potential donors the process of establishing provenance of an object. Participants will learn what is needed to establish and document the age, place of origin, and line of ownership of objects with historical value.
- **Your Story/Our Story–Recording Oral Histories:** Participants may record a brief personal memory, a family story or a memory of a historical event. Family members are encouraged to interview each other.

As a companion to the series, the National Museum of African American History and Culture has produced “African American Treasures: A Preservation Guide”, a 30-page guidebook to be distributed to individuals, community groups and educators to highlight the importance of proper preservation techniques. The guidebook is part of the “Treasures” kit. Also distributed will be white cotton gloves, archival tissue papers and archival documents sleeves to help people keep their personal treasures safe.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture was established in 2003 by an Act of Congress, making it the 19th Smithsonian Institution museum. It is the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, art, history and culture. The Smithsonian Board of Regents, the governing body of the Institution, voted in Jan. 2006 to build the museum on a 5-acre site on the National Mall. The Constitution Avenue site is adjacent to the Washington Monument and across the street from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. For more information about the Museum, please visit www.nmaahc.si.edu or call Smithsonian information at (202) 633-1000, (202) 633-5285 (TTY).

###