

The Importance of Being
“*NICE*”

The Carlton A. Funn, Sr. Collection

Alexandria Black History Museum



Started in the 1950s by a young seventh grade history teacher in Alexandria, *The Funn Collection*, consists of over 1,490 exhibition display boards created by Carlton A. Funn, Sr. until his death in 2012. They vary in theme and style but are designed to “promote awareness, human dignity and cultural understanding” and above all else to encourage everyone to be *NICE*.





Born in Alexandria, Virginia on January 29, 1932, Carlton A. Funn, Sr. was a Parker-Gray High School alumnus.

He received a B.A. from Storer College and an M.A. in Education from Virginia State University, before returning to his native Alexandria to teach in the public school system.

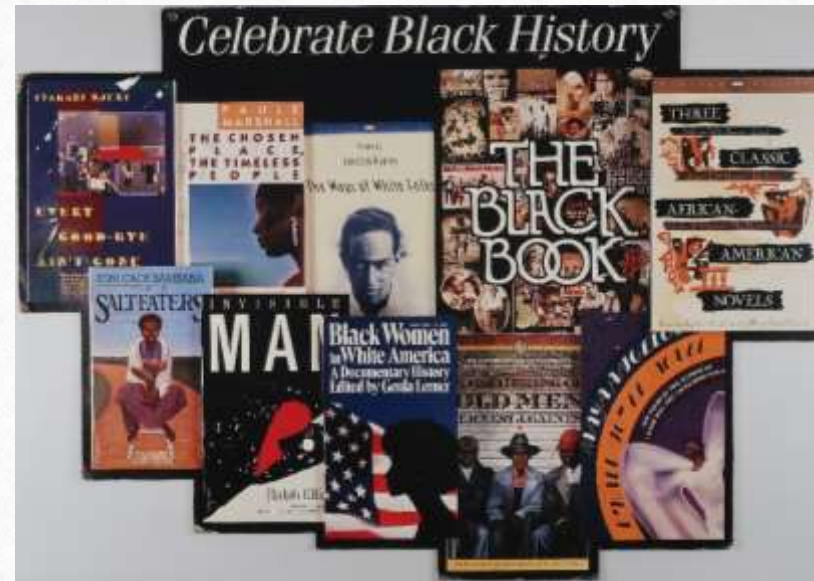


In 1957, a new state commissioned textbook was produced for seventh grade social studies teaching. It was entitled, “*Virginia: History, Government, and Geography*” and was one of a series of three new books for different grades that presented a view of Virginia’s past, especially regarding slavery, that owed more to political agendas than to historical fact.

The text and illustrations provided a view of “happy slaves” who enjoyed their work and their lives under their benevolent and caring masters. The books remained official State approved books until the early 1970s.

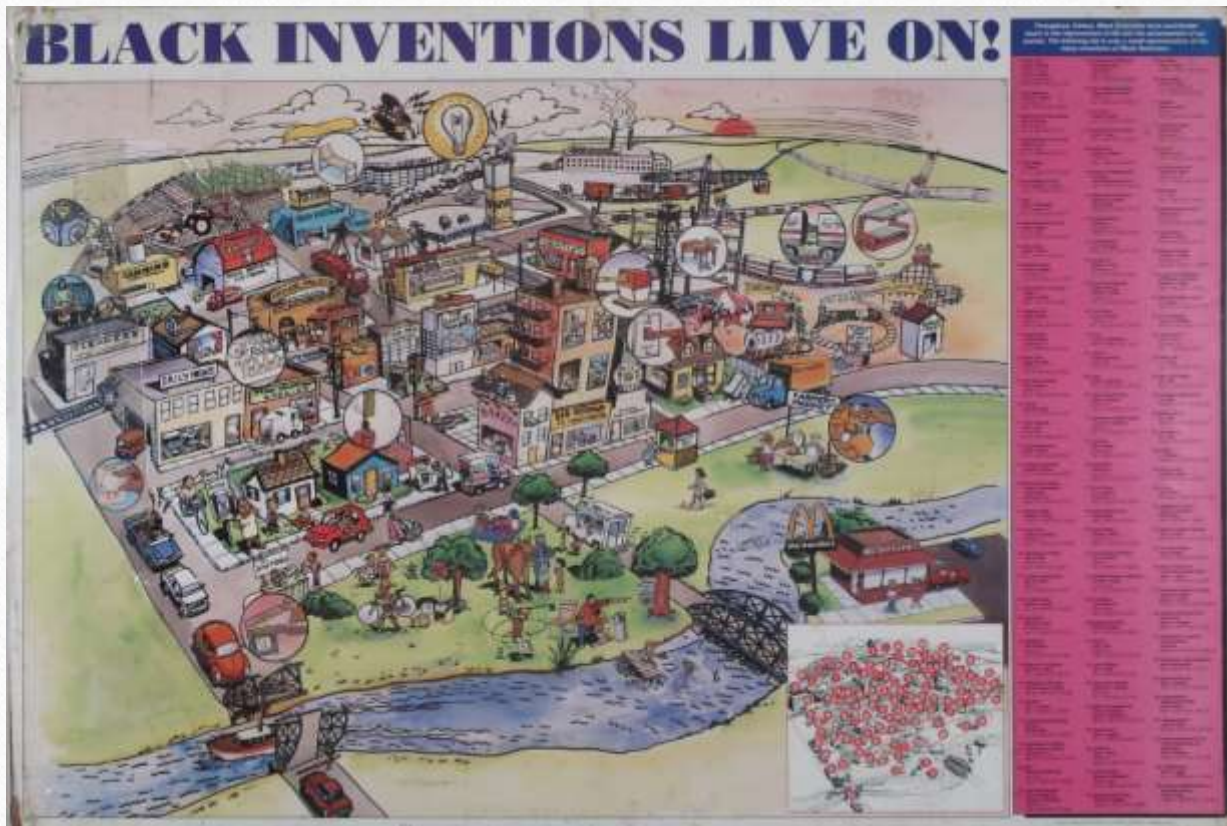


Funn was dismayed at the lack of positive representation and the distorted version of history within the school textbooks.



He began to purchase posters, books, pamphlets, artifacts and more, to broaden the narrative he could teach and make his class of thirty students "*aware of their positive heritage*".

Funn worked with the *Association for the Study of Negro History and Life*, specialty shops and other vendors to acquire the materials for his growing collection.



The material he amassed grew into Funn's first exhibit, entitled, "*The Afro-American Experience*" and took his collection beyond his classroom.

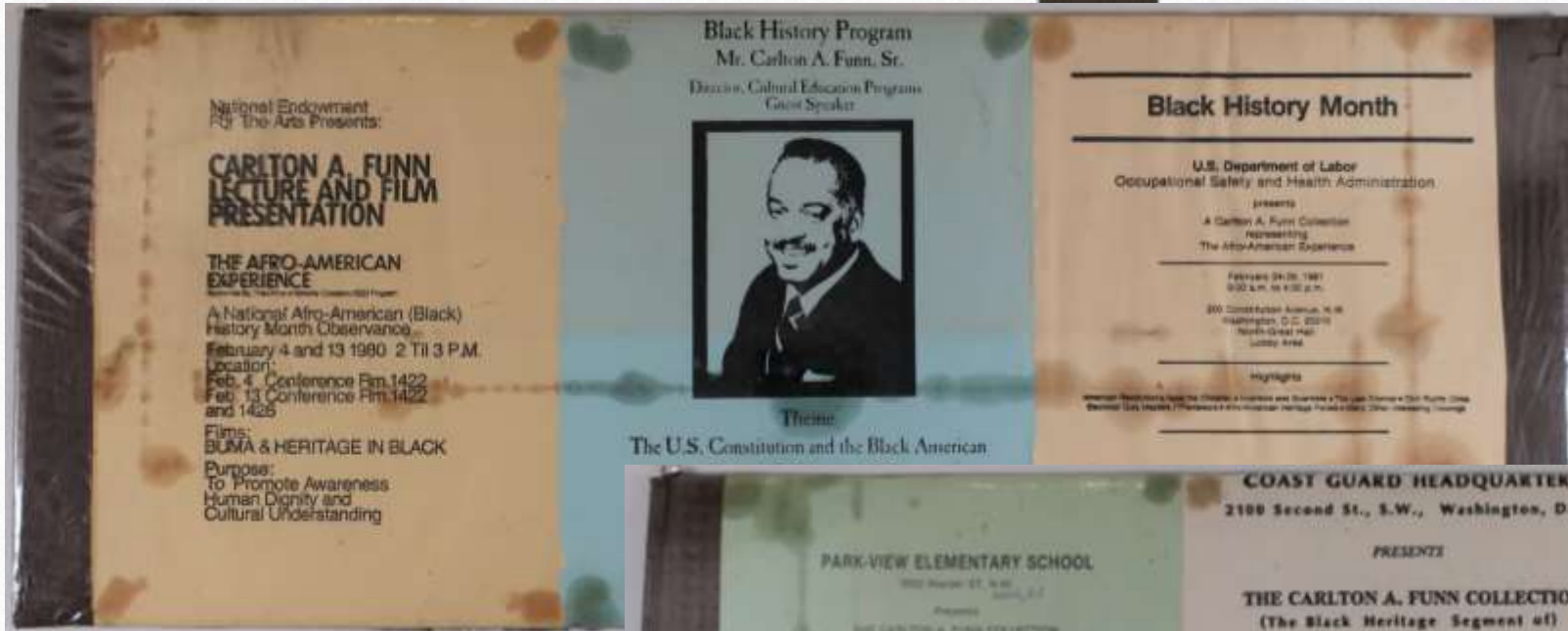




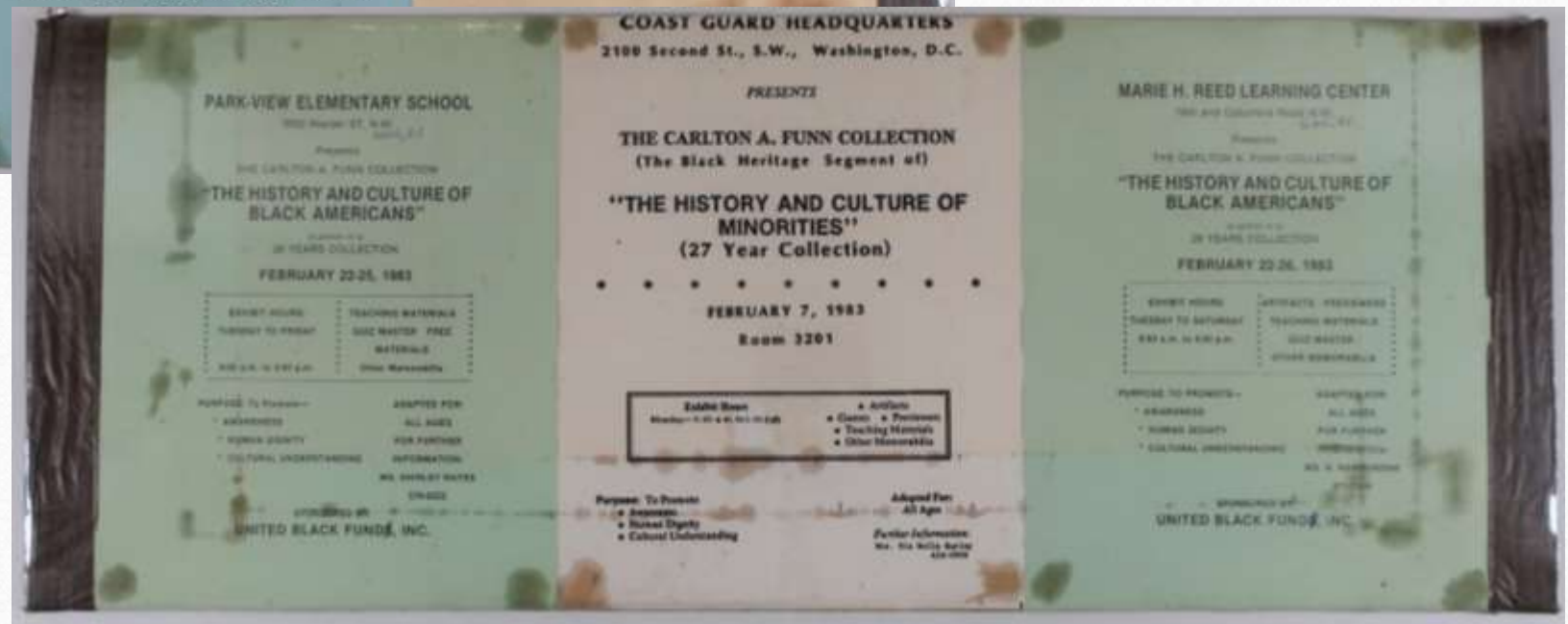
Funn's collection was used in a six-week pilot Black Studies program in Alexandria in 1969, with Funn as one of the instructors.

Alexandria Public Schools went on to provide further Black Studies courses at then T.C. Williams High School (now Alexandria High School) for Juniors and Seniors.





Requests for the collection followed and Funn took his growing exhibit and lectures around the country to a variety of venues including community centers, and military and government agencies.



On May 29th 1970, 19-year old Robin Gibson, an African American, was shot and killed by a white employee at a 7-Eleven in Alexandria. For the next week the City erupted with firebombing and rioting. Eventually the violence calmed but the tension remained.

Funn approached the Alexandria Police Department with the idea of bringing his Black Studies lectures and his collection to the officers. Within three weeks of the murder, Funn gave his first of four sessions at the Police Department.



The newspaper articles on the left and right of this board, dated June 19th and July 11th 1970, detail the program that Funn undertook. The photograph shows Funn speaking to the group of white police officers, with boards from his collection lining the walls behind them.



Funn soon widened his scope beyond the African American experience, creating his second exhibit in the early 1970s entitled, “*The History and Culture of Minorities*”.



Eventually he used the name “*National/International Cultural Exhibits (NICE)*” and stated that the purpose of his exhibit was: “*to promote awareness, human dignity and cultural understanding*”.

50th Anniversary

**National/
International
Cultural
Exhibits**

(NICE ENTERPRISES, INC.)

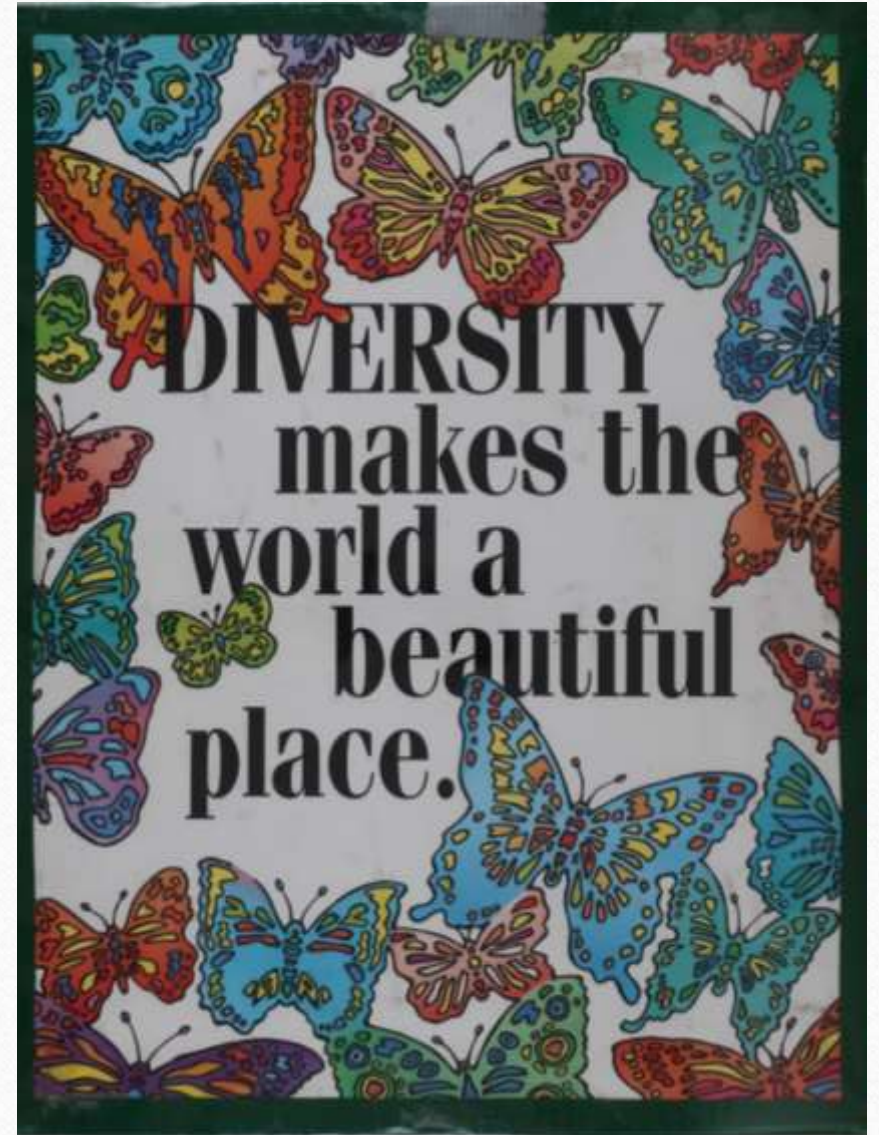
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Carlton A. Funn - Exhibitor

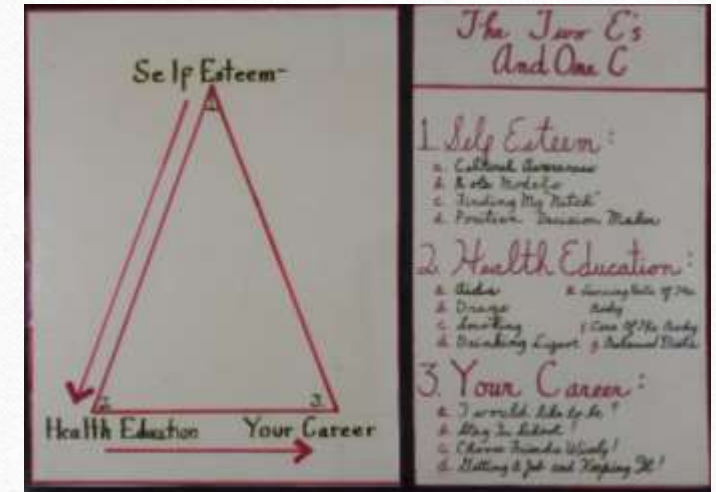
“Anyone who so quarantines a child that he may know only people of his own race, damages that child’s chances to learn to live Intelligently, Sensitively, and Responsibly in the only world he will have to live as an adult.....”

Dr. JOHN FISHER
(PRESIDENT)
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
TEACHERS COLLEGE

For Funn it was not enough to simply teach his class of 7th graders their own histories. He wanted to teach *all people* the positive impact that we *all* have on the world. People from all countries, religions, cultures, men, women and children create a diversity that enriches us all. He believed that with this greater knowledge would come a pride in ourselves and our own self-worth, and a respect for all.



The collection grew to almost 1,500 display boards featuring a variety of mediums, including handwritten text and drawings, newspaper articles, photographs, and mounted poster series on a variety of topics. The scope of the collection broadened to include international topics, such as the Holocaust.



BLACK HISTORY
EXHIBIT

**SELF
ESTEEM**

DR. MARTIN
LUTHER
KING JR.

NATIVE-
AMERICAN
HERITAGE

You're A Shining Star
No Matter Who You Are!
(A Role Model Program For Youth)
Presenter: Carlton A. Funn Sr.

African-Americans
on
**U.S. Postal
Stamps**

MARCH
NATIONAL WOMEN'S
HISTORY MONTH

HISPANIC-
AMERICAN
HERITAGE

THE STATUS
OF WOMEN

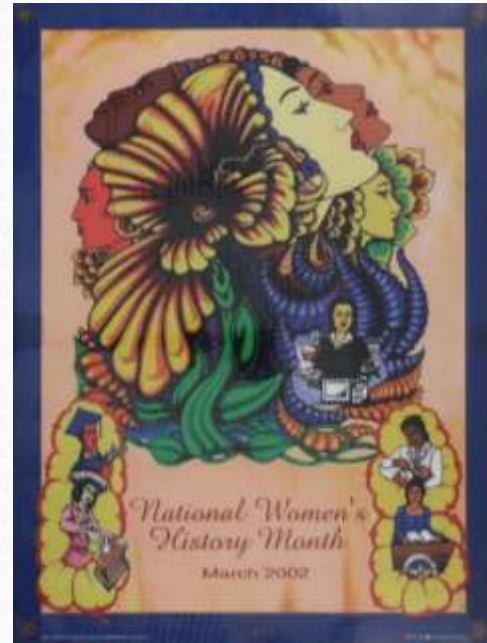
**DIVERSITY
IN
MUSIC**

**AFRICAN
AMERICAN
MILITARY**

NATIONAL
DISABILITY
OBSERVANCE-

The
African-American
in Science and
Technology

IMMIGRATION-
ELLIS ISLAND



For Funn, *“in order to understand today and tomorrow, you have to understand yesterday”*.

He believed in the importance of learning our own and others’ heritages to promote understanding and pride in everyone’s contribution to the world.



Speaking to *The Washington Post* in 1972, Funn stated that the exhibit was, “a commitment to showing and teaching more people than I ever could in one classroom. I feel good inside every time I show this collection”.

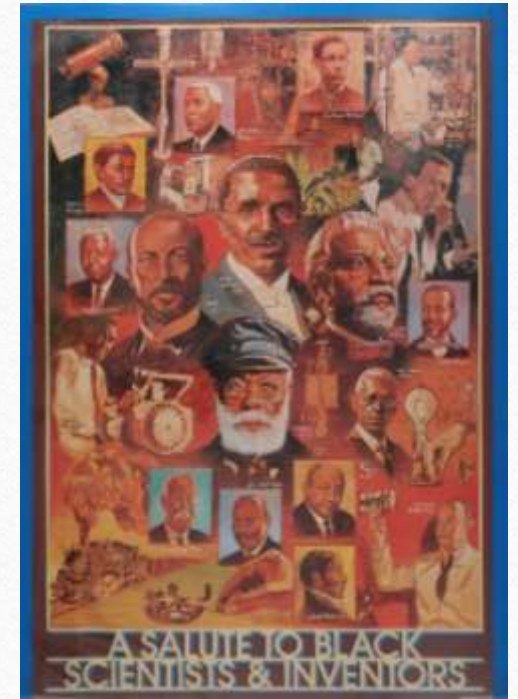


67. Hayttsville, Md.	Northwestern Senior High School-American Ed. Week - October 24-27, 1972
68. Dallas, Texas	Mountain View College-College Unions Interna. - November 3-4, 1972
69. Alexandria, Va.	T.C. Williams High School-Human Relations/Resource Seminar for all public school students and teachers-administrators - January 18-19, 1973
70. Rockville, Md.	RoseMary Hill Elementary School-Mini course in Afro-American History and Resource Materials for 45 teachers-administrators - January 18-19, 1973
71. Alexandria, Va.	Northern Virginia Community College at Ballleys X Roads
72. Washington, D.C.	Joe Paige T.V. Show (Mini Afro-American Display) <u>BLACK PROGRESS</u> Saturday, February 10, 1973
73. Washington, D.C.	United States Office Of Education (HEW) Black History Week - Feb. 12-16, 1973
74. Washington, D.C.	Georgetown University-February 19, 1973
75. Alexandria, Va.	Jefferson-Houston Elementary School - February 22, 1973
76. Washington, D.C.	Park-View Elementary School - February 23, 1973
77. Fort Meade, Md.	Fort George Meade Army Post - February 25, 1973
78. Roanoke, Va.	Hotel Roanoke - March 1973 - All Public School Superintendents of Virginia Schools 1 1/2 days
79. Washington, D.C.	United States Information Agency - April 1973 (24 days)
80. Pittsburgh, Pa.	Pittsburgh Civic Arena - Black Solidarity Fair - May 10-12, 1973
81. Camp Springs, Md.	Taney Jr. High School - May 24, 1973
82. Washington, D.C.	World-Wide Black Expo - D.C. Guard Armory - August 10-16, 1973
83. Terre Haute, Ind.	Indiana State University - Black Awareness Week - September 10-12, 1973
84. Terre Haute, Ind.	Federal Prison-Invitation of Black Inmates
85. Harrisburg, Pa.	Harrisburg Area Community College - May 1974

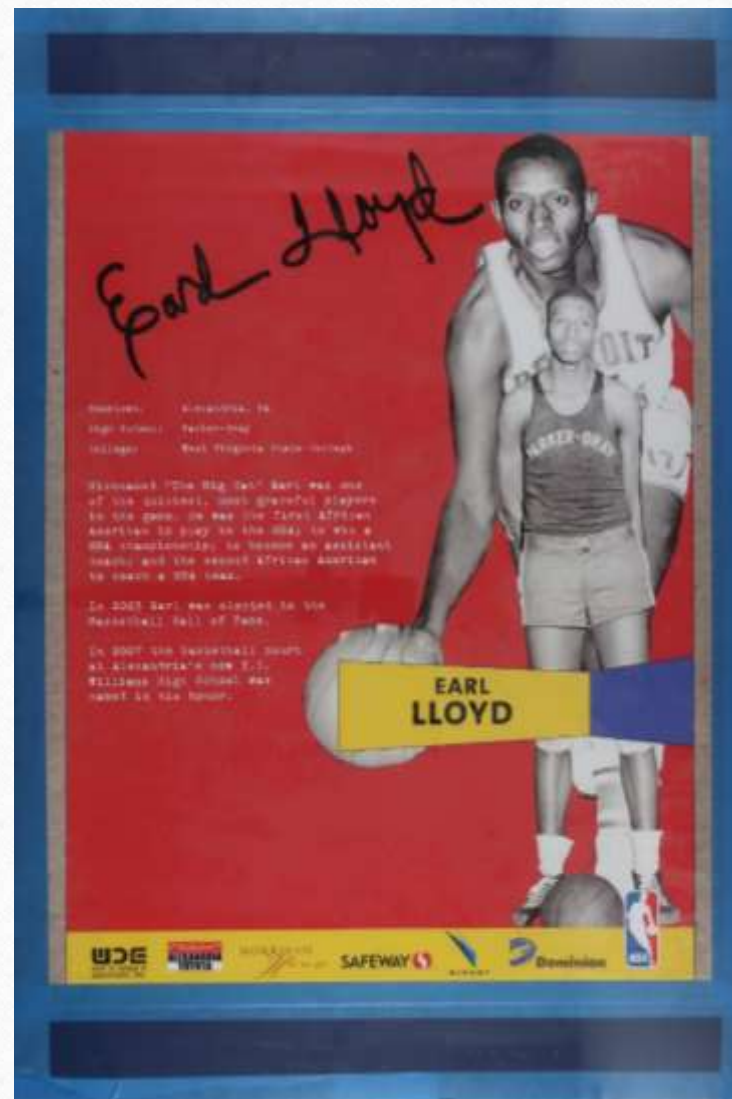
This board from c.1990 is mounted with a typed list of the venues that Funn had presented his exhibit. Of the 301 entries, the majority are in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia, but they include venues in Texas, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Maine.

In addition to schools, colleges, community centers and churches, Funn exhibited at Federal and military facilities, and in Federal prisons. He also appeared on the *Joe Paige* television show in 1973.

In the 1972 *Washington Post* article, Funn also commented that “kids need heroes”. By illustrating the achievements of people from a diverse range of backgrounds and heritages, attaining greatness in the fields of entertainment, the military, as inventors, entrepreneurs, public servants and more, he helped to broaden the scope of heroes and role models visible to new generations of children.



Funn also celebrated the achievements of his fellow Alexandrians. He always highlighted when people were products of the Alexandria Public School System, such as Parker-Gray Alum, Earl Lloyd.



There are boards dedicated to Alexandria's former Mayor, William D. Euille, the Reverend Dr. Faye S. Gunn, from Alfred Baptist Church, and Alexandrians in the Armed Forces and business.



There are boards for important events in Alexandria's Civil Rights Movement, such as the 1939 Alexandria Library sit-in, as well as boards to highlight Alexandria's *Living Legends*, such as Ferdinand T. Day and Vola Lawson. Funn himself was recognized as a *Living Legend* in the class of 2009.



ALEXANDRIA, VA. QUEEN ST. LIBRARY SIT IN 1939!

The Power of Protest

On September 23, a national newspaper published an article by James L. Linn, a white journalist, who reported on the "sit-in" protest at the Alexandria Library. The article, titled "Whitey," "many black, Parker City" residents believe, "cannot understand black history." They have neither the courage nor the stamina to deal with discrimination.

On the other hand, white citizens cannot understand Alexandria's substance to merely just Parker City events. For example, National Parker City Protest Lines have numerous websites commemorating the event. One of the ways the city has declined to invest capital only in the Parker City neighborhood.

Known historically as a poor, Parker City is a remnant of a shattered black neighborhood. According to the 1980 census 22.3 percent of Alexandria was black, 30.7% of it concentrated in the low-income Glenmont District. Today Parker City's black population is less than 10%. The neighborhood developed as a dilapidated, disinvestment, leaving vacancies and wages.

Mass Civil's Call to Community - an initiative of cultural diversity - was issued years ago. The issue of Parker City's problems remains unresolved from the 1950s placement of a federal highway, US Route 1, to the 1980s location of the Franklin Road bridge. Parker City residents have left the path of economic progress.

Ignorance is defined as the lack of interest. On September 24, newly arrived Planning Director Frank Hunter told a community audience that past neighborhood inequities are not less in state. Far enough!

Historic Parker City is part of the city's Blackback Road Small Area Plan, a plan now undergoing citizen review. Like Samuel W. Tucker in Union & County School Board, residents reject the color line of yore. Whether it was politicians putting the worthless shaker advocate in public housing or SDC's failure to maintain scarce public housing, citizens want equitable solutions. Still the city was lacking availability and wages to repair affordable housing especially during recessions.

Despite the Mayor and Planning Department's written assurance that Parker City's application for the National Register of Historic Places would be submitted no later than June 30, 2007, bureaucratic delays continue. If the city's goal is to build their residents an avenue to live somewhere, here local knowledge. The Blackback Plan notwithstanding, the issue is forward Parker City's submission is now.

Perhaps the city has forgotten that protest, the right to protest and justice, is part of Parker City's legacy. One certainly Virginia's State Department of Historic Resources recognizes only part of the city's low-income district, Alexandria, Town of Freedom (1st Reg).

People do not understand what it is like to express white beliefs and like beliefs to a child, those express

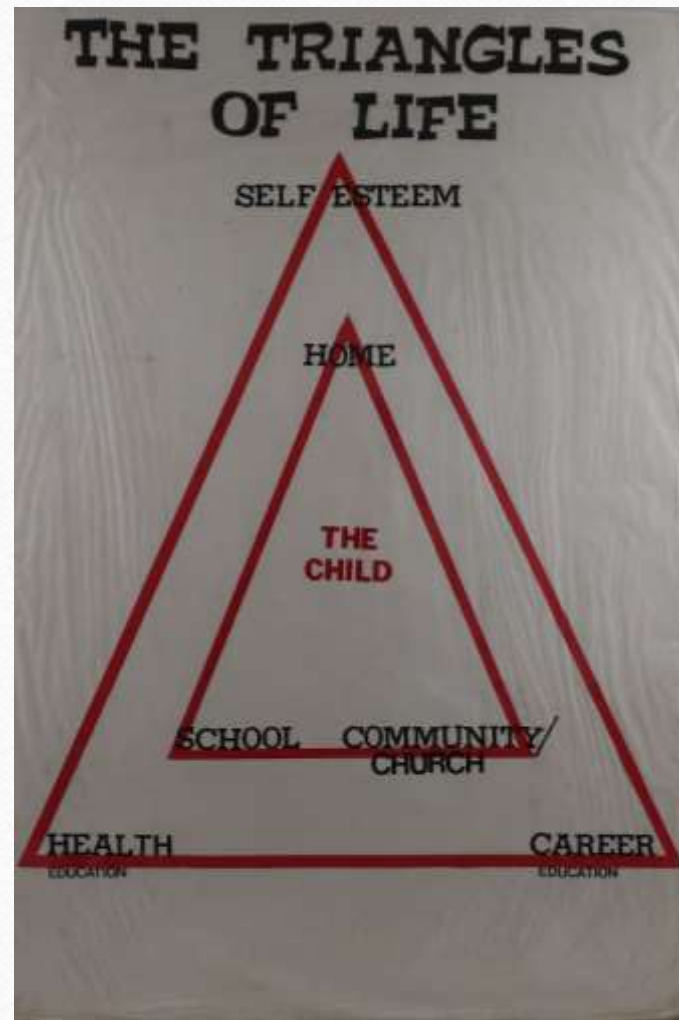
Men being escorted out of the East Walker Street Library

Recess and Pledging Cards, Parker City, despite its rich history and vibrant eligibility, remains Alexandria's only line of historic district.

"I think it would be good for the Blackback Road process if the city would contract, perhaps expedite, the Parker City nomination." Wilson Thompson said. Thompson is a Parker City businessman who ended black history.

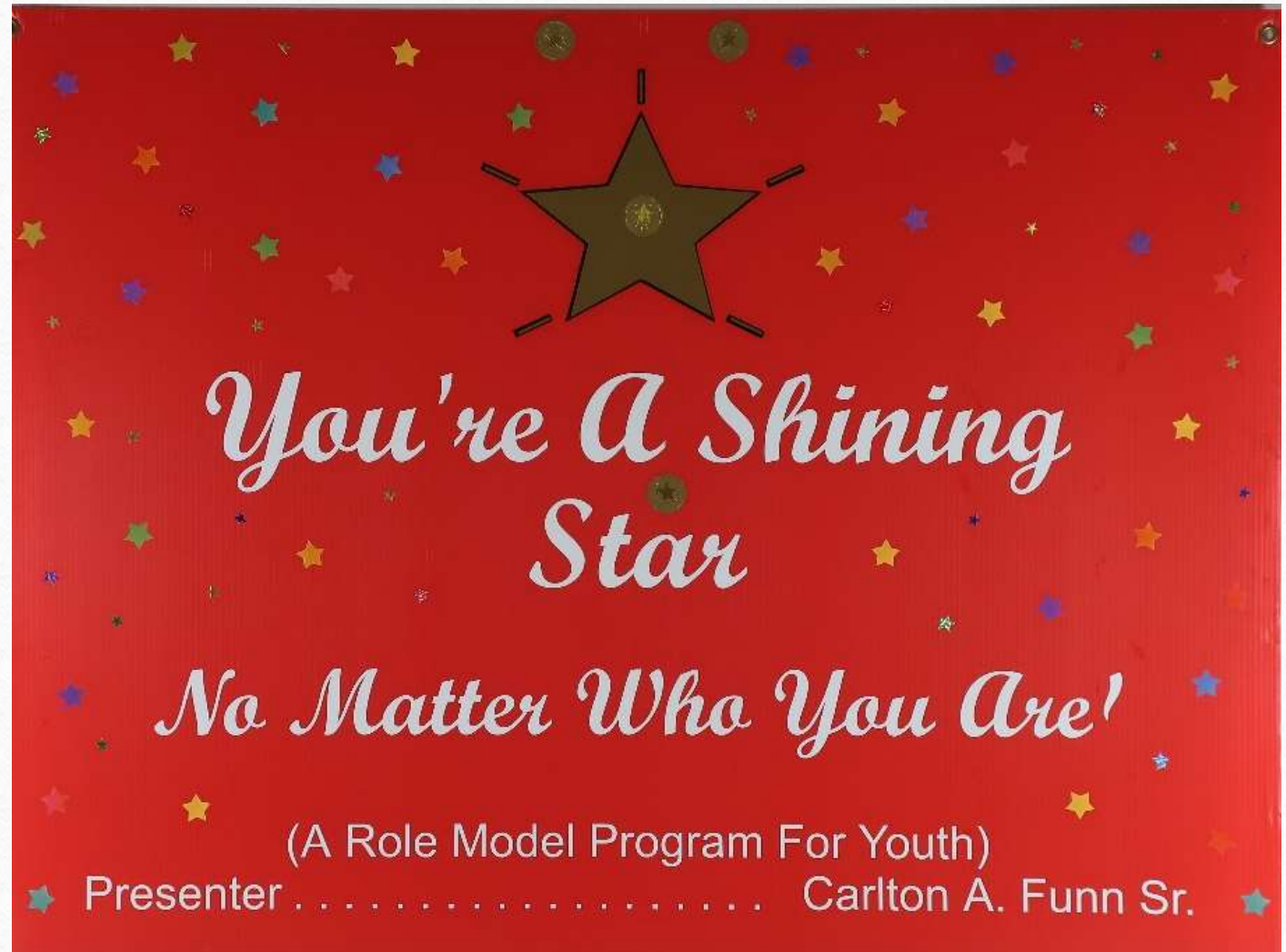
For their own freedom on Linn's school paid recess, Parker City's school paid extra tax money. The school building was demolished in the name of progress the same way that the Blackback system. It would be a crime of another age for the city to not Parker City's maintenance and care in the national recognition for.

In addition to providing role models, Funn had a range of boards that promoted the idea of self-worth. The “*Self-Esteem*” range of boards gave guidance on how to think positively and reach your full potential, as one of the boards states, “*Your Attitude Determines Your Altitude!*” There were also boards with anti-drug and anti-violence messages.



This theme expanded into a new program by Funn entitled, *“You’re A Shining Star”*.

Funn was also involved in organizations that furthered this work such as the “The Grandfather’s Group”, which provided connections between young African American boys and positive adult male mentors or “grandfathers”.



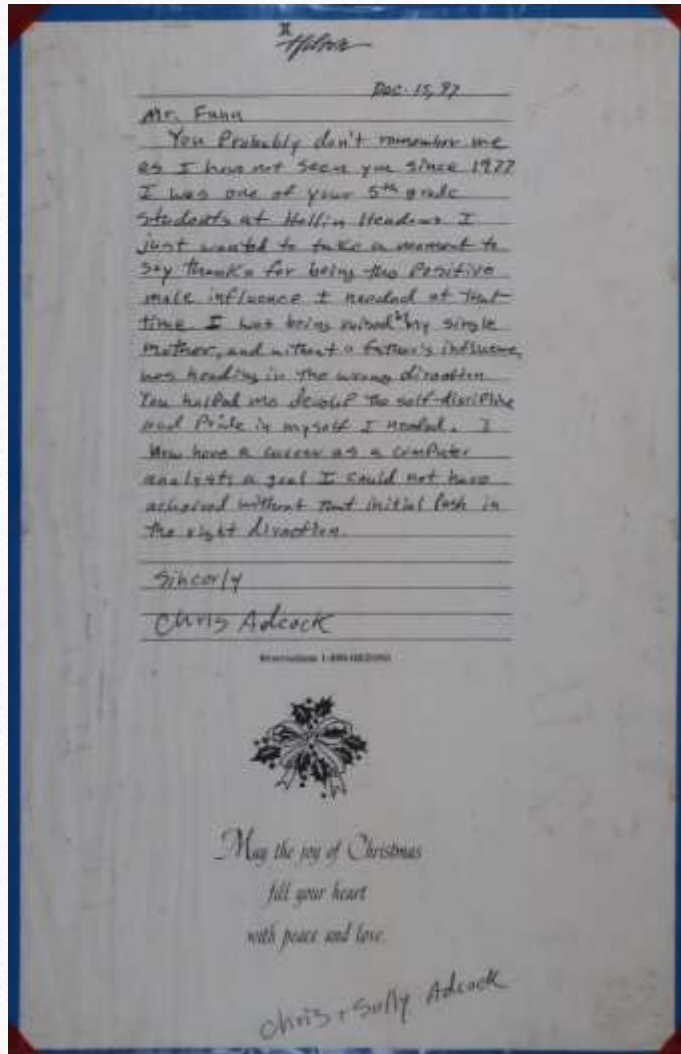
Funn was president of the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage (ASPBH).

The ASPBH has sponsored a poster contest (now poster exhibition) for Martin Luther King, Jr. Each year the event has a theme that echoes the work and legacy of Dr. King.



These boards are from a series of photographs of an *African Americans in the Military/ Buffalo Soldiers* event at a school. The event was attended by Major Lee Bowman and Funn displayed his exhibition and gave a lecture using his boards. The photographs also illustrate a drill by the School's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC).





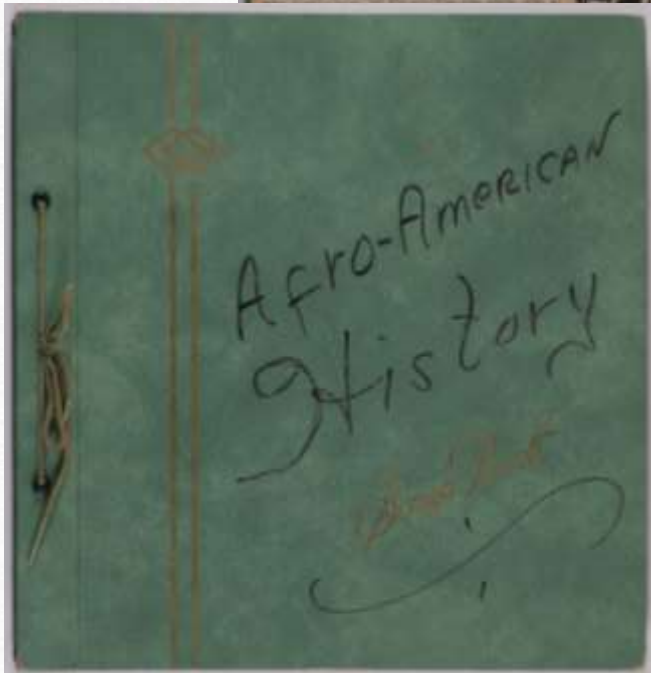
The impact of Funn's collection and his exhibitions was felt across the City of Alexandria and beyond.

Congressman Jim Moran stated in the 1998 Congressional Record, *"Your work has inspired and taught young children and adults everywhere the value of contributions made by African-Americans and other minorities."*





The Funn Collection includes a scrapbook filled with articles from local and national newspapers about African Americans, including articles about Funn's own work. At the back of the scrapbook are copies of printed handouts to accompany his exhibition.



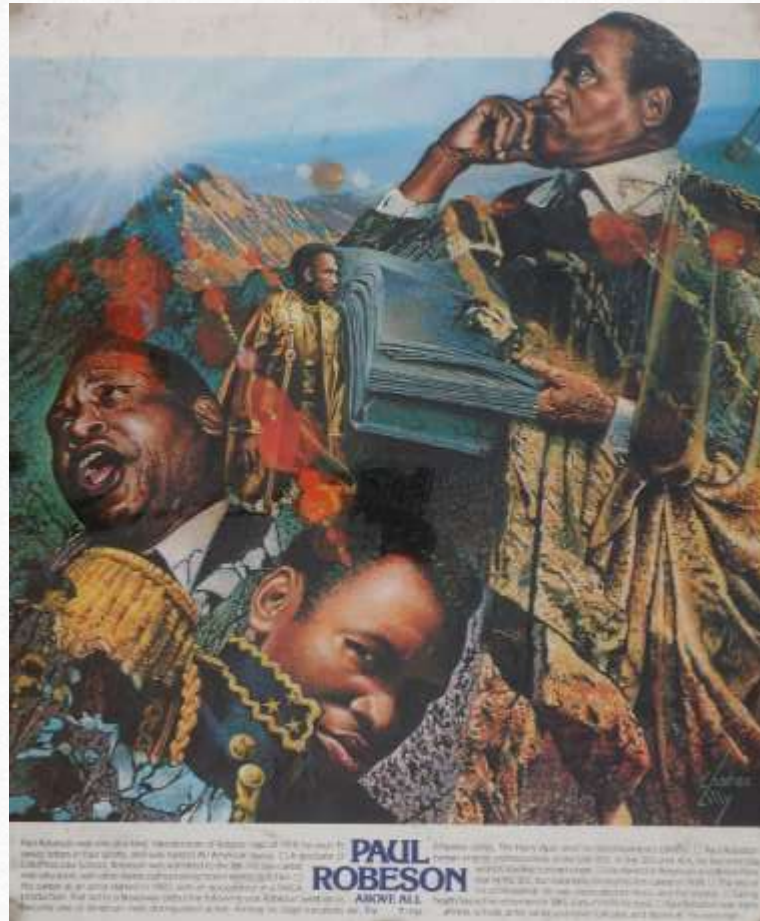


In 1940, Booker T. Washington became the first African American to be featured on a United States Postal Service stamp. In 1978 the USPS launched the Black Heritage Stamp series, starting with Harriet Tubman. Funn collected the advertising posters for the series, which he mounted for display.



and the Truth shall make you free...
This stamp honors Sejourner Truth
abolitionist and freedom fighter.

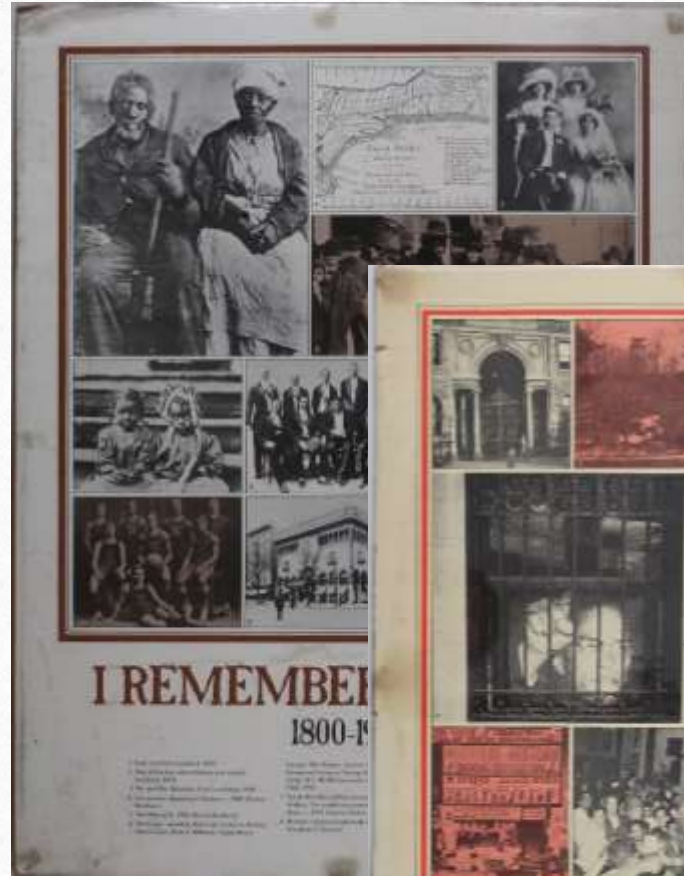




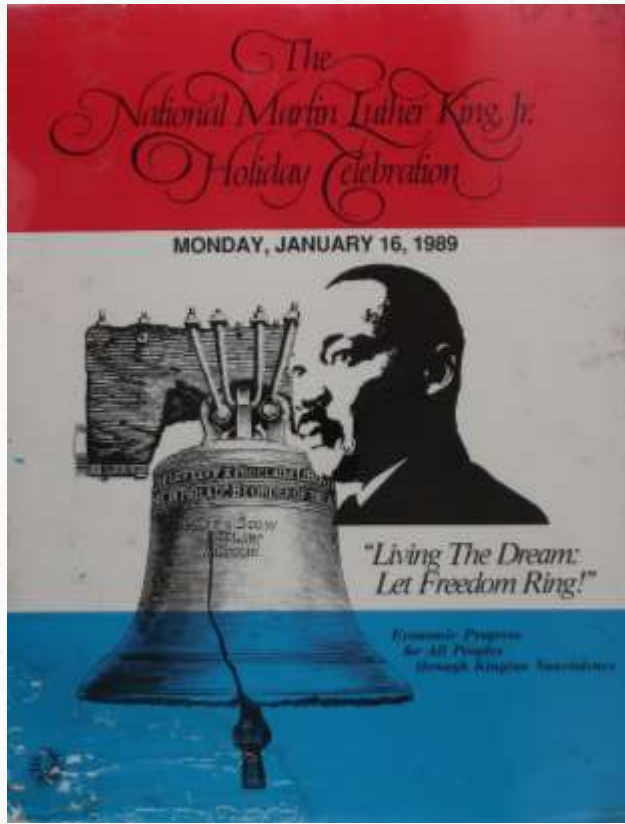
There were boards mounted with posters of famous African Americans throughout the Twentieth Century.



There were also boards mounted with poster series on a variety of topics, including these for Howard University Hospital and the history of Harlem, New York.



Funn collected a wide range of material on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and addressed his work, his ideology and his legacy, including the celebration of MLK Jr. Day and the MLK Jr. monument.



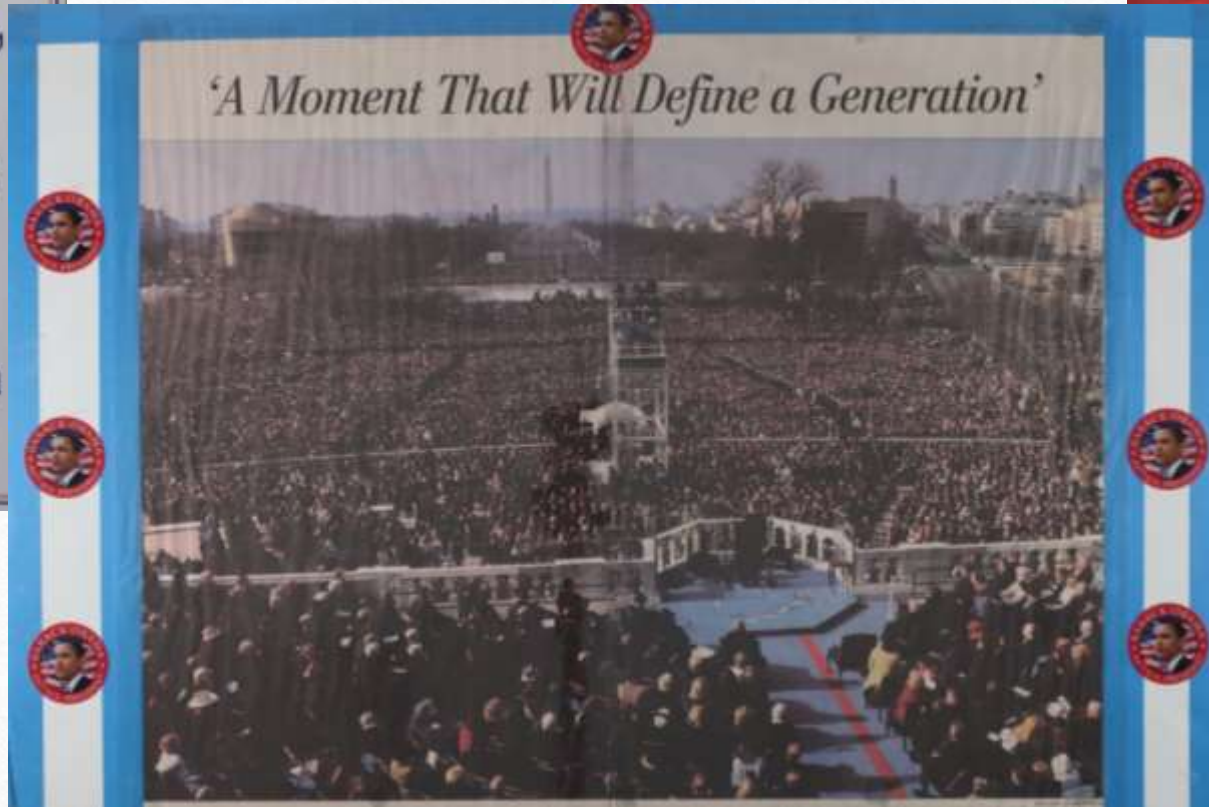
DR. KING'S DREAM WAS THAT "SOMEDAY PEOPLE WILL BE JUDGED NOT BY LOOKS OR COLOR OR LENGTH OF HAIR, BUT BY THE CONTENT OF THEIR CHARACTER AND THE INTENT IN THEIR HEARTS"

Dream Big

"Life is precious,
and part of its
beauty lies in its
diversity"

- President Obama

In his 70s Funn was still creating new display boards for the exhibition. New additions included a large series of boards celebrating the election, and re-election, of President Barack Obama.

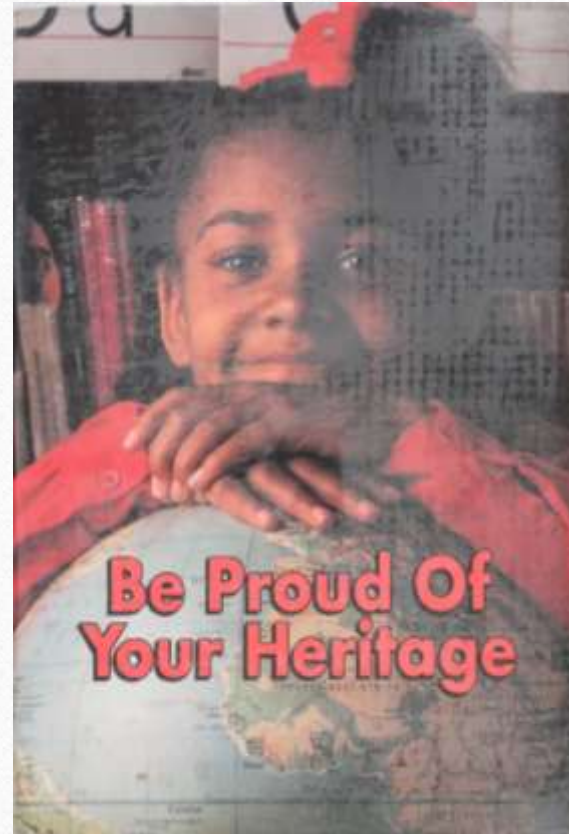


In 2013, over 1,490 boards from the Carton A. Funn Sr. collection were donated to the Alexandria Black History Museum by his children, Carlton Jr., Marc, and Tracye. The Museum has catalogued and photographed the entire collection. The collection is now available to view using the Office of Historic Alexandria online collections website. Click below to start your adventure through the Funn Collection....

[Historic Alexandria Collections Online](#)



**ALL STUDENTS
CAN LEARN !!!**



Please note that the Carlton Funn Collection consists of educational materials created from the 1950s to the 2010s and some of the information and language used may be outdated or incorrect. Please be aware of this when choosing materials to use with students. Also note that some content, such as graphic images of the Holocaust, may be upsetting to viewers.