

Delta Studies Center

Arkansas State University

A Message From the Center

Peggy Robinson Wright

The last few months have been busy as usual at the Delta Studies Center. We accomplished a number of project activities through our Ford Foundation Grant that ended in March that we are proud of. They included: Information Clearinghouse, 1st Annual Tourism Conference, new network of partnerships involved or interested in development of heritage tourism

across the region. Training/technical assistance in prompting and developing African-American museums is being provided to several groups identified at our Tourism Conference.

The "Delta Bridge Project" a joint, collaboration of ASU and the Southern Development Bancorporation pilot project focused on Phillips County, Arkansas is being completed. Focus groups have been

held and everyone is extremely pleased with the honest and open dialogue that took place with numerous community residents. A more detailed report will be given in our next newsletter.

Our thoughts are with families during this difficult time across the country and we hope that all those away will return safely and soon.

ASU-Delta Studies Center, Peggy Robinson Wright appointed to the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission



Speaker of the House Herschel W. Cleveland has appointed Peggy Robinson Wright, Coordinator of the Delta Studies Center at Arkansas State University, to serve on the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission for two years.

The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC) is made up of 15 members, and

is responsible for maintaining the most up-to-date and comprehensive source of information concerning the rare plant and animal species, and high quality natural communities of Arkansas. Systematic analysis of this natural heritage data can be used to identify locations that hold exceptional importance for the state's natural diversity, but that lack formal protection. To protect such tracts of land, the ANHC also maintains a System of Natural Areas along with comprising remnants of the original natural landscape,

and lands within the System of Natural Areas that provide vital habitat for imperiled plant and animal species.

Wright, who joined the ASU staff in January of 1998, said "I look forward to serving on the Commission and thank Speaker of the House Cleveland for giving me this opportunity."

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Martin Luther King Day Celebration

Arkansas State University Students Activities Board planned a week of activities to celebrate Martin Luther King's Birthday. Activities included: MLK Breakfast and Birthday Cake, a workshop on Diversity conducted by Christopher J. Harris, a day of service at the Abilities Unlimited Cleanup, a march, and a candlelight vigil.

All of these events were set up to commemorate and cele-

brate Dr. King's efforts to increase equal rights and diversity. The theme "Wake Up and Remember the Dream" was specifically chosen to inspire young people to remember the dream that Martin Luther King stood for as well as to continue to strive for it's accomplishment.

These events were made possible by these sponsors: Student Activities Board, Black Student Association, Christopher J. Harris, Abilities Unlimited, Delta Sigma Theta, and Alpha Phi Alpha.



Leading a demonstration demanding a strong civil rights plank in the GOP campaign platform, in Chicago. (Photo by Francis Miller/LIFE)

Black History Month Wrap-up

The theme for this years Black History Month was "Remembering and Celebrating Our Rich Legacy." The celebration began on February 2nd with two showings of Porgy & Bess Production at the Fowler Center and ended on February 26th with the 2003 Miss Essence Contest.

Other activities included guest lecturers, documentaries on the lives of some of the worlds most influential African-Americans of our time, as well as a seminar series on African-American Health Issues.

All these events would not



have been possible without these program sponsors:

- Arkansas State University
- Delta Studies Center
- Black Students Association
- Concert Lecture Series

- Gaston Lecture Series-ASU/ Mountain Home
- Heritage Studies Ph.D. Program
- Ms. Jackie Gilbert, Delta C.L.A.S.S. HPPI Project
- Dr. Lillie Fears, Department of Journalism
- Office of Diversity
- Office of Student Affairs
- Student Activities Board

A special thanks goes out to all who were involved for a job well done.

Good Luck to Delta Studies Center's Graduating Seniors



[Left to Right] **SHAWN BROWN, MICHELLE HALE, and MARQUITA MCCLINA**

All three will graduate from the ASU College of Communications with degrees in Radio/TV

Photo by: Peggy R. Wright

Cultural Heritage Tourism Conference Held

Midwest Organization for the Recognition and Recording of Ethnic Heritage (MORARE) held its seventh annual conference in St. Louis, Missouri, April 11-13, 2003. The conference theme was "Culturalisms in America Part II." Peggy R. Wright, Coordinator of the Delta Studies Center was the opening plenary speaker. She gave an overview of the Delta Studies Center focus and emphasis since it officially opened in 1998 and its successful efforts in promotion of Cultural Heritage Tourism across the region with funding received from the Ford Foundation. Mrs. Wright also gave comments on the new Heritage Studies Ph.D. program at ASU and shared with participants materials that she had brought on the Delta Studies Center and the Heritage Studies Ph.D. program.

Conference sessions included such topics as: Preserving and Interacting the Civil Rights in the National Park Service, Italian Immigrant Women and Food, Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South, Remembering Our Grandmothers: Navajo Women and Photographs, Telling Tales: Stories of Protecting Our Cultural and Historic Resources, and the Visible Man (and Woman) African American Framers and Their Marks.

The highlight of the conference was the presentation by the luncheon keynote speaker, Dr. Dianne Swann-Wright, Director of African-American and Special Programs at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc. Her



Dr. Dianne Swann-Wright
Luncheon/Keynote Speaker

topic was "Inside the Lives of Sally Hemmings and Thomas Jefferson." She started her talk with words of wisdom from a friend of hers, Bernice Johnson Reagon, of Sweet Honey in the Rock, when she began her life-long work. Those words were, "Don't let the work you have done and others before you be wasted."

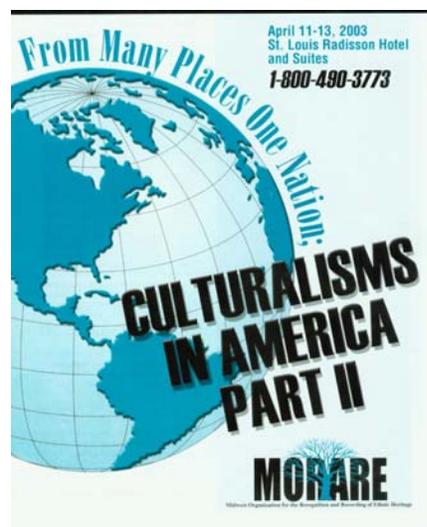
Dr. Swann-Wright told the audience that the research on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemmings was a focus on the entire African-American community at Monticello not just on the relationship of Jefferson and Hemmings. The story of the relationship has been told at different times to those in the community and over 140 families including Hemmings' family have been interviewed. Additional insight of that 30-year relationship that has been documented was given by Dr. Swann-Wright and was enjoyed by all in attendance. She is in the process of co-authoring a new book on the Jefferson-Hemmings saga to help document the truth about this story

and period in time that has caused so much controversy.

Saturday, evening, participants got the opportunity to attend, "It Ain't Nothing But the Blues" a musical tracing the roots of blues music. From its roots in Africa, through the delta and to the south side of Chicago, the four time Tony Award nominated, including "Best Musical" Blues review transported audiences on a soulful musical odyssey whether they were down home gospel or country into a lot of clapping hands and dancing in their seats.

The conference held each year in St. Louis is one that is worth attending. For more information about MORARE contact:

Ms. Angela da Silva, President
(315) 865-0708 or (800) 490-3773
email: dasilva@midwest.net
Website: www.tourism-network.net



Conference Addresses Rural Community Needs

The 9th Annual Arkansas State University Agriculture-Business Conference was held on Wednesday, February 19, 2003 at the ASU Fowler and Convocation Centers. The conference focused on government policies that impact the structural transformation of agribusiness, and the ability to traditional agricultural policy to address the broad needs of rural communities.

The four main topics discussed at this conference were:

- Government Farm Policy Outlook
- Collective Bargaining Work for Farmers focused on market power of farmers and how to level the playing field between farmers and agribusiness.
- Rethinking Rural Policy vs. Agricultural Policy talked about how traditional production agriculture is a shrinking portion of the rural economy.
- Agriculture Finance Issues described credit analysis techniques that can determine credit risk, create lender marketing opportunities, and improve lender portfolio performance.

For more on this conference or other events dealing with the College of Agriculture contact:

Dr. Calvin Shumway
Phone: (870) 972-2085
Email: cshumway@astate.edu
Website: www.agri.astate.edu/

“Memory and Sense of Place in the Mississippi Delta Lecture” By: Vaneta Williams Harvey

Dr. William R. Ferris was an outstanding lecturer and entertainer at the Delta Blues Symposium on Friday, March 28, 2003, sponsored by the ASU Heritage Studies Ph.D. Program and the Office of the President. He is the former director of the National Endowment for the Humanities and is presently a Joel R. Williamson Distinguished Professor of History at the University of North Carolina. Among his many accomplishments is the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, which was published in 1989. Ferris is author of publications in folklore, American literature, fiction and photography. Former President Bill Clinton awarded him the Charles Frankel prize for the work he has done to educate the American public on the humanities. The French government also honored Ferris with two awards, “Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters,” and “Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters.”

As he began his lecture, he recognized the directors of all the



Dr. William (Bill) R. Ferris playing the guitar during his lecture on March 28th.
Photo by: Vaneta Williams Harvey

Delta Programs at Arkansas State University and the work that has been accomplished since his last visit to the university. “On-going activities in the Delta were highlighted because there has been so much lost in the past, but with the work that is being achieved we can keep our culture in the Arkansas Delta. We do not realize what our culture is until we leave the Delta and live in another culture. Also, according to Ferris, there is much work that needs to be done in the Delta, for instance, the History of the Civil Rights Movement in the Arkansas Delta is an open frontier.”

“Opening the doors to Heritage Studies will open the doors for the local people who are the greatest sources of history, culture, and heritage.” Race, gender, and culture have been left out of our heritage, but Ferris argued that they should not be left out of the work of Heritage Studies. He praised the work in the Mississippi Delta and, also, challenged all present to continue to preserve the Heritage of the Delta for our heritage as Americans.

The lecture was closed with samples of his work. He first played the guitar and sang the blues with one of the famous “Honkie Tonk Blues.” Dr. Ferris also showed a film with the voice of Mr. B.B. King one of the greatest Blues Artists “Give My Poor Heart Ease,” and the film “Hush Hoggie Hush” which portrayed religion in the south. Not only do Baptists pray before they eat, but so do their pigs. Everyone enjoyed Dr. Ferris’ Lecture and left with an excitement for the work that they are a part of in the Arkansas Delta.

Strong-Turner Alumni Chapter Honors Program



Mrs. Herschel Davis Gaines, Strong-Turner Alumni Chapters Honors Program Speaker

The Strong-Turner Alumni Chapter (S-TAC) held its "Annual 3.0/Graduating Seniors Honors Program" on Monday, March 31, 2003 at 6:30 p.m. in the Carl R. Reng Center Ballroom.

There were two hundred and one honorees, and according to the Chairperson, Victor Hill, one of the largest yet. Peggy R. Wright who gave the welcome and occasion was followed by Sharon Lee, S-TAC President who gave a brief history of Strong-Turner. Brent Butler, ASU Senior and

member of United Voices Gospel Choir presented a world class solo "I Believe I Can Fly."

After his selection, Dr. Wilbert Gaines introduced the speaker for the evening, Mrs. Herschel Davis Gaines. Mrs. Gaines speech entitled "Here by Design" was very timely and to the point. In her speech, she referred to a book by Dr. David Niven, *100 Simple Secrets of Successful People*. Some points on confidence and success from his book that she gave to the honorees were.

1. The individual along defines what success is;
2. If you don't believe, no one else will;
3. Role models are not one size fit all;
4. The past is not the future;

5. Success is a science, not a secret;
6. Endings are as important as beginnings.

Her speech was enjoyed by all in attendance and gave all those present food for thought, not just the students. Victor Hill presented Mrs. Gaines with a small gift that was very befitting of the occasion.

Ms. Candance Seward and Dr. Simon Whittaker presented t-shirts to the 3.0 and graduating seniors. Also, one-year Strong-Turner Alumni Chapter memberships were presented to all of the graduating seniors by S-TAC.

Many thanks to Mr. Hill and his committee members for a job well done.

2nd Annual Arkansas Black Mayor's Conference



Mayor Bryant, ABMA President-Forrest City
Photo by: Peggy R. Wright

The Arkansas Black Mayor's Association under the leadership of President Larry S. Bryant, Mayor of Forrest City, held its' Second Annual Arkansas Black Mayor's Conference on Friday and Saturday March 28-29, 2003. The Conference held at the Forrest City Civic Center had a very impressive turnout.

The theme: Thinking

positive as we lead our cities forward" was very fitting and evident in the enthusiastic manner that each Mayor present exuberated. Topics and speakers included: Medicare/Medicaid, Grants/Federal Surplus Agency, SBA/Business Development, Housing and African-American Tourism and how it is an economic boost for small rural communities.

The African-American Historical Society, Inc., with special recognition of Helena Mayor Dr. Robert Miller, presented Certificates of Appreciation to all the mayors for their untiring service and dedication.

At the close of the conference the mayors held their annual business meeting.

Sponsors of the event included Alltel, Entergy, and ASU-Delta Studies Center. We applaud all of the thirty-six ABMA mayors for their continued hard work in their respective communities.



Mayor Miller-Helena and others focus on ABMA presentations.
Photo Peggy R. Wright



[L to R] Mayor Morris-Meniffee & Mayor Taylor Marianna standing to receive certificates.
Photo Peggy R. Wright

ASU Faculty Member Joins DRA

Dr. Lillie M. Fears, a native of West Helena, Arkansas has been hired as director of communications at Delta Regional Authority in Clarksdale, Miss. Fears holds degrees in journalism and in mass communications from University of Missouri-Columbia (Ph.D.) and Arkansas State University (BA). She goes to the DRA with a diverse background in practicing and in teaching journalism. She has served as assistant to the director of the Black Studies Program at University Missouri-Columbia. In that position, she performed a number of public relations duties, which included editing the national publication, *The African-Americanist*.

Fears also has worked for several newspapers and cable television. She was a reporter and copy editor for the *Arkansas Democrat*, *Arkansas Gazette*, *Columbia Missourian* and the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*



Dr. Lillie Fears

in Sarasota, Fla.

An educator, Fears as taught journalism, mass communications and English at the following institutions: Phillips Community College, Helena, Ark.; Philander Smith College, Southern Technical College and University of Missouri-Columbia. In addition, She holds the position of associate professor of journalism at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro which she will be leaving to join DRA in mid-May 2003.

Fears' primary duties will consist of making recommendations on the impact of decisions and activities of the Authority, developing and leading the Authority's cooperation with government agencies, organizations and media. She will also serve as an external and public affairs advisor on DRA matters, especially where the aspects of policy and procedures are critical, and assist in providing developmental,

as well as analytical reviews of external policy alternatives.

"I think that my being a child or product of the Delta will help me in this new position because, naturally, I have genuine concern and a big heart for the people of the Delta. I still consider myself one of these people, and I want nothing more than to see places like my childhood home in West Helena, Ark., begin to look and feel like it did when I was growing up there in the 70s," she said.

Fears said she believes her combination of academic and practical experience will help her in performing all the responsibilities that are expected of her. "Overall, I see my job at DRA as that of helping (DRA) better communicate to the public all the great things that it has been doing and continues to do since it began."

We wish Dr. Fears well and look forward to working with her in her new role at DRA.

Dr. Peter Ascoli Lectures on the Rosenwald Schools By: Stephen Carroll



[L to R] Mrs. Terry Johnson (Heritage Studies Secretary), Dr. Peter Ascoli, & Dr. Clyde Milner (Heritage Studies Director) Photo by: Vaneta Williams Harvey

On Thursday, February 13th, Dr. Peter Ascoli spoke at ASU as part of the program "The Rosenwald School Building

Program in the Rural South: 1913-1931," hosted by the Heritage Studies Ph.D. Program. Ascoli, a consultant and professor at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago has been working on his grandfather's biography for 10 years.

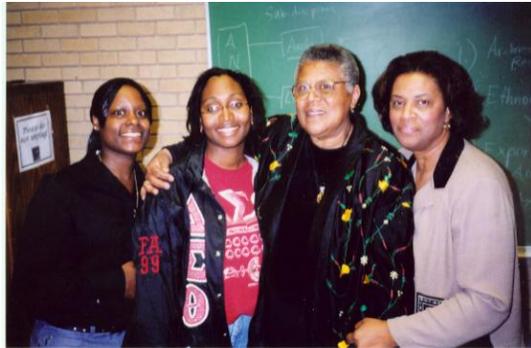
Julius Rosenwald was a partial owner of Sears-Roebuck, and as the business grew he quickly became a millionaire. A firm believer in charity, especially to black causes, and being of German-Jewish decent,

Rosenwald saw an affinity between blacks and Jews, who at the time were both under heavy persecution. Most black children during this time received little, if any, formal education, often because they were needed out in the fields. Therefore under Rosenwald's guidance schools like Booker T. Washington, formerly located in Jonesboro, Arkansas and another 5,357 other schools, wood-working shops, and teachers homes were built in 15 southern states to educate these African-American children.

Delta Blues Symposium IX: Defining the Delta

Since its inception, over eight years ago, the Delta Blues Symposium has provided opportunities for scholars, artists, performers, and the general public to share insight, discuss issues, and to celebrate the unique culture of the Mississippi River Delta region. Sponsored by the Department of English and Philosophy at Arkansas State University the ninth installment of the Symposium was held March 27-29, 2003 on ASU's main campus in Jonesboro.

This year's event focused on how the Delta is perceived by local, regional, national, and international entities. Looking at in-



[L to R] Nakondrea Weeks, Angela Austin, Ms. Brown-Trickey, & Peggy R. Wright are pictured after showing of documentary "Journey to Little Rock: The Untold Story of Minnijean Brown-Trickey."
Photo by: Peggy R. Wright

sider and outsider point of views and perceptions of the Delta, the Delta Blues Symposium IX: "Defining the Delta," featured presenters such as Arkansas bluesman CeDell Davis who opened the Delta Blues concert on Thurs-

day evening March 27th, Mississippi writer Beverly Lowry, social activist and former member of the Little Rock Nine Minnijean Brown Trickey, and folklorist and previous NEH Director Dr. William Ferris. Additional features include organized panels, Delta Film Series, and writing workshop.

For more information about the Delta Blues Symposium, please contact:

Dr. Bill Clements, Professor of English and Philosophy
Phone: (870) 972-3043
Email: delta@astate.edu
Website: www.clt.astate.edu/blues

OAH Conference held in Memphis

The ninety-sixth annual meeting of the OAH (Organization of American Historians) met in Memphis, Tennessee April 3-6 at the Memphis Cook Convention Center. The theme this year was: Social Justice and American History and as noted by the OAH President, Ira Berlin, the theme gained special momentum since the second full day of their meeting, Friday, April 4th, marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel not far from where the meeting was convening.

One of many receptions held was the Southern Reception on Thursday evening, April 3rd



[L to R] Ernest C. Withers, & Dr. Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman (ASU History Professor)
Photo by: Peggy R. Wright

cosponsored by the Southern Historical Association, Arkansas State University's Heritage Studies Ph.D. Program, Delta Heritage Initiatives Program, Rhodes College, Center for the study of the American South, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Oral History Program, University of

North Carolina, Chapel, University of Memphis, and the University of Mississippi. The reception was a success because of the organizing efforts of Dr. Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman, ASU History Professor. Honored guest for the evening was Ernest C. Withers, well-known African-American photographer of Memphis, Tennessee. Mr. Withers for more than seventy-five years has captured the people, events, and changes surrounding him in the area where he has lived and worked through his camera.

The conference was filled with many rich and pedagogical debates throughout the week. The ninety-seventh annual meeting will be held in Boston in 2004.

Arkansas State University

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We're on the web.
www.clt.astate.edu/dsc

Up Coming Events

May 10, 2003 at 10:00 a.m.: The Louisiana Purchase Monument will be rededicated at the Louisiana Purchase Historic State Park located 21 miles south of Brinkley on Arkansas 362.

May 16, 2003 from 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.: William Dunbar 1804 explorer of the Louisiana Territory Performances will be held at the Mariana City Park.

2003 National Scenic Byways Conference

May 18-21, 2003

Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, New Mexico

For more information visit their website at: www.byways.org

Preservation of African American Cemeteries

1st Annual Conference

September 19-20, 2003

Helena, Arkansas

For more information contact: Peggy R. Wright
(870) 910-8034 or Toll Free (877) 731-3020

Welcome to New Members of ASU

Dr. Lonnie Williams, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Dr. George Grant, Director of the Dean B. Ellis Library