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Charlotte, NC 28205

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Sandra M. Phoenix  
Executive Director  
HBCU Library Alliance  
111 James P. Brawley SW  
Atlanta, GA 30314

Dear Sandra,

It is a pleasure for me to express my support of the HBCU Library Alliance's "Building Capacity for Humanities Special Collections at Historically Black Colleges and Universities" proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities. A project of this design is evidence of the value of the extensive humanities collections at HBCU institutions and their value for promoting teaching, research and engagement by the broader academic community.

The proposed project will advance much-needed conservation and preservation of at-risk humanities-based materials at HBCUs, provide consultation and training, and promote advocacy of the humanities. These efforts will significantly improve the condition of humanities collections and their benefit to the broader academic community.

As a community historian, I've used Johnson C. Smith University's Duke Library for countless projects since I first arrived in Charlotte in 1981. I initially worked for the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission on a study of older neighborhoods including the Biddleville neighborhood, which is adjacent to JCSU. That research led to a PhD at UNC Chapel Hill, where I wrote a book about how the segregated Charlotte: *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte* (UNC Press). Subsequently, I worked for sixteen years as Staff Historian at Levine Museum of the New South. During that time I wrote a history of the Beatties Ford Road corridor for JCSU's book *Let There Be Light* <https://www.historysouth.org/jcsu/> And I curated the national-award-winning exhibition *Courage: The Carolina Story that Changed America* about the Carolina roots of the *Brown v Board* decision — which is now on permanent display at the JCSU library. Since retiring from Levine Museum, I'm spending even more time at Johnson C. Smith's library. I am working with the adjacent neighborhood of McCrorey Heights, home to many key Civil Rights leaders in the 1950s -1970s. In addition to drawing upon JCSU's collection we will also add to it, thanks to a grant from the local Arts & Science Council which teams us with a filmmaker to record oral histories which will be deposited at the JCSU Archives.

As an urban and Southern historian, I can say that HBCU libraries are an essential resource for anyone who is interested in the history of African American communities. HBCUs are more than just educational institutions; they are the heartbeat of their cities and regions, each a coming-together place for educated, empowered African American leaders. Today most HBCU libraries hold archives that shed light on those individuals and their networks. And because of their long-standing grassroots connections, these HBCU libraries are known and trusted — the places where new generations curious about African American history naturally come to discover and learn.

I applaud the HBCU Library Alliance's initiative to pursue grant funding and look forward to the impact of this project on humanities-based collections.

Should you require further contact with me, please feel free to reach me at [tom@historysouth.org](mailto:tom@historysouth.org) or 704-577-5103.

Sincerely,

*Thomas Hanchett*

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