

# Donna Marcia Wells

Prints and Photographs Librarian,  
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Donna Marcia Wells (1953-2009) was the Prints and Photographs Librarian at Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center from 1993 until June 2009, when she left the University to pursue a variety of independent professional interests. Before going to Howard University she was the assistant archivist for the American Association for the Advancement of Science, having previously served as archivist for Gallaudet University, where she also taught museum studies, and worked as a photo librarian at the Library of Congress. She earned a M.L.S. in Library and Information Science from the University of Maryland, College Park, a

B.A. in art history from Hampton University, and she was A.B.D. in the Department of History at Howard University.

Ms. Wells devoted her career to the care and interpretation of African American collections and to the preservation of Washington, D.C. history. She lectured frequently and conducted workshops on the care of photographs for general audiences. Her lectures on photographic history incorporated a unique approach, fusing the role of African Americans as subject, creator and critic of images. Not a photographer herself, she was an active member of the Exposure Group African American Photographers Association and the FotoCraft Camera Club, serving as consultant for their public programs and as a resource for the archiving of their work. She served on the city's Emancipation Celebration Commission and on the Historical Records Advisory Review Board. She was a board member of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and had served on the program committee of the D.C. Historical Studies Conference since 1995.

She wrote reviews and articles on photography and photographers, including *Protecting Your Image*, which was published in *Essence* magazine in 1999. Ms. Wells co-authored with Thomas C. Battle, MSRC's director, the highly-acclaimed *Legacy: Treasures of Black History*, published by National Geographic in 2006. *Legacy* showcases the many photographs, books and documents in Moorland's collections that had never been published in book form, representing a visually exciting exploration of the Black experience and its impact on our nation. *Legacy* received the Outstanding Contribution to Publishing Award from the American Library Association's Black Caucus (BCALA) and the Arline Custer Memorial Award from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC).



From its introduction by the distinguished ancestor John Hope Franklin (John Hope Franklin was the James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of History, and former Professor of Legal History in the Law School at Duke University. He was a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. His books include the award-winning *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*) to the bibliography and extensive index, *Legacy* represents a major new contribution to African-American history. The Black experience and its impact on our nation come alive in 12 chapters that sweep from ancient Africa and the slave trade to the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction; the Harlem Renaissance and the Jim Crow Era; and the modern Civil Rights and Black Power/Black Arts movements. The book has more than 150 historic items include documents, letters, images, and artifacts, many never before published, with 18th-century maps of Africa; the pincushion of Elizabeth Keckley, Mrs. Lincoln's seamstress; depression-era images by Robert M. McNeil; and a Langston Hughes letter in which he shares his first famous poem *I, Too, Sing America*. Rare photographs show a daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass in profile and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, circa 1880. Objects include a bell of Sally Hemmings, Thomas Jefferson's slave and companion, and NAACP membership buttons from the 1960s. And notwithstanding *Legacy* has more than two dozen prominent Black scholars and activists offer expert insights on the collection, on subjects ranging from traditional African societies to 21st-century art and politics, making this book as definitive as it is beautiful—a priceless resource that will inform and fascinate serious students and casual readers alike.

After leaving MSRC, Ms. Wells was working independently on several projects: co-curator of the exhibit Daniel Freeman: the Man behind the Camera and Form and Content: Selected Works by Floyd Coleman, at the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., opening November 6, 2009. She was also curator of an exhibit for the Museu Afro Brasil in Sao Paulo, opening at the end of November 2009, highlighting the accomplishments of African Americans through the eyes of Black photographers. Most recently, she was the recipient of the Arline Custer Memorial Award from MARAC for her article with David Haberstick, *The Scurlock Studio: A Biography*, in *The Scurlock Studio and Black Washington: Picturing the Promise* (Washington, D.C., The Smithsonian Institution, 2009).