Pitt Library System Opens Archives of 4 African American Pittsburghers to Public

By Sharon S. Blake

A closer look into the lives of four prominent Black men from Western Pennsyl-

vania who made important contributions to U.S. history is now available at Pitt’s University Library System (ULS). Pitt graduate students, under the su-

pervision of Pitt archivist Wendy Pflug, have spent the past 12 months organizing and catal-

ogizing the personal papers of:

- Frank Bolden (1914-2003), world-

renowned war correspondent for The Pitts-

burgh Courier newspaper.


- Percival L. Prattis (1895-1980), jour-

nalist with The Pittsburgh Courier and the first Black reporter to gain access to the U.S. House of Representatives press galleries; and

- Tim Stevens (1945-), past president of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP.

“This project represents a significant effort on the part of the ULS Archives Service Center to preserve, organize, and make available a key body of material for the further study of the contributions to American history made by these important men,” said ULS director and Hillman University Librarian Rusty Miller.

The four collections represent almost 200 linear feet of biographical information, correspondence, subject files, scrapbooks, images, newspaper clippings, and other materials. They are housed at Pitt’s Archives Service Center, 750 Forbes Ave., Suite 300, Point Breeze.

Researchers wanting to view a collection are asked to call ahead at 412-244-7091 to make arrangements to assist.

The ULS has finding aids in place that offer detailed information about the contents of the collections. Information on the individuals and their collections follows.

Frank Bolden (1914-2003), world-renowned journalist and feature writer for The Pittsburgh Courier and as one of the first World War II correspon-

dents accredited by the U.S. Department of War. Because of racial segregation in the military, Bolden was only permitted to cover African American units. His articles, which described the bravery of soldiers in the 92nd Infantry Division in Italy, helped debunk the myth that Black soldiers could not handle the stress of combat. Bolden, who earned a bachelor’s degree from Pitt in 1934, returned to The Courier in 1945 as a features writer after declining offers from Life magazine and The New York Times.

He has been honored with numerous awards, including the prestigious National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) Award for Excellence in Journalism.

K. Leroy Irvis (1919-2006), legendary Pennsylvania legislative leader.

One of Pennsylvania’s most prominent politicians, Irvis represented Pittsburgh as a Democrat in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1958 to 1988. Among Irvis’ many achievements was his election as Speaker of the House in 1977, the first Black to hold that position in any state legis-

lature in the United States since Reconstruc-

tion. Prior to his successful political career, Irvis worked as a teacher, Pittsburgh steel worker, editor, civil rights worker, news commentator, law clerk, assistant district attorney, civilian attaché to the U.S. War Department, and author. He was a 1969 graduate of the Pitt School of Law. This collection contains a wide variety of mate-

rials, including the piece of legislation Irvis sponsored that made Pitt a state-related institution in 1966, as well as other leg-

islative papers and photos, publications, correspondence, and campaign literature.

Percival L. Prattis (1895-1980), journalist with The Pittsburgh Courier and the first Black reporter to gain access to the U.S. House of Representatives press galleries; and

Tim Stevens (1945-), past president of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP.

This collection documents the life and career of Prattis, former executive editor of The Pittsburgh Courier. In that position, he highlighted the struggles of Blacks for fair employ-

ment opportunities, from teaching posi-

tions to sports. Prattis also had duties as a photographer and was responsible for international assignments to the Middle East, Far East, and post-World War II Europe. During World War II, he traveled extensively, covering the Black Armed Forces. In 1947 he was one of the first Black journalists unanimously granted membership in the U.S. Senate and House press galleries.

Material in this collection dates from 1916 to 1980 and includes correspondence, financial reports of the Courier, drafts of articles and stories, scrapbooks, and photographs.

Tim Stevens (1945-), past president of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP.

This collection documents the life and career of Stevens, who has become a prominent figure in the Pittsburgh community for decades. Raised in the Hill Dis-

trict, Stevens earned a bachelor’s degree in political science and a master’s degree in urban and regional planning from Pitt.

He has served as both executive director of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP. Stevens founded the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP), an organization aimed at promoting Black involvement in local, state, and national elections. Stevens also is a well-known jazz performer and vocalist. He has released several albums, both solo and with his ensemble, the Tim Stevens Project, and has written a variety of songs, including one recorded by Nancy Wilson.

This collection contains correspondence, meetings minutes, brochures, flyers, personal notes, news articles, memos, cassette tapes, VHS tapes, and photographs.

The ULS is the 23rd-largest academic library system within the United States. Under the administration of the Hillman University Librarian and ULS director, it includes 21 libraries and holds more than 6.2 million volumes and world-class specialized collections, among them the Archive of Scientific Philosophy and the Archives of Industrial Society, as well as major foreign-language materials from around the world totaling 1.4 million volumes. The ULS offers state-of-the-art services and facilities, with innovative digital library collections and capabilities.

Pitt Legacy Laureate Wen-Ta Chiu

Is Named Taiwan’s Health Minister

By Amanda Left Ritchie

Taiwan’s premier, Wu Den-yih, appointed Pitt alumnus Wen-Ta Chiu the new minister of Taiwan’s Department of Health, effective Feb. 1, according to the Taipei Times. Chiu, a 2009 Pitt Legacy Laureate, was one of four new ministerial appointments to the premier’s cabinet.

Chiu is a highly distinguished neuro-

surgeon, medical researcher, academic leader, and public health advocate. He served as the president of Taipei Medical University from 2008 to 2011, stepping down earlier this month after being named to the premier’s cabinet. Chiu received his master’s and doctoral degrees in public health from Pitt’s Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH) in 1987 and 1989, respectively.

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Isenberg Collaborates With NIH
On Link Between Alzheimer’s, Loss of Nitric Oxide in Brain

By Anita V. Srikameswaran

A researcher at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, in collaboration with scientists from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), has discovered that the deadly plaques of Alzheimer’s disease interact with certain cellular proteins to inhibit normal signals that maintain blood flow to the brain. Their findings, which could lead to new approaches to treat the dementia, were recently published in PLoS ONE.

Levels of nitric oxide (NO) — a signaling molecule that helps regulate blood flow, immune and neurological processes — are known to be low in the brains of people who have Alzheimer’s disease, but the reason for that hasn’t been clear, said study coauthor Jeffrey S. Isenberg, a professor in the Division of Pulmonary, Allergy, and Critical Care Medicine, Pitt School of Medicine.

“Our research sheds light on how that loss of NO might happen and reveals biochemical pathways that drug discoverers might be able to exploit to find new medicines for Alzheimer’s,” he said. “There is evidence that suggests enhancing NO levels can protect neurons from degenerating and dying.”

The researchers, led by first author Thomas Miller and senior author David D. Roberts, both of the Laboratory of Pathology in NIH’s National Cancer Institute (NCI), found in mice and human cell experiments that amyloid-beta, the main component of the plaques that accumulate on brain cells in Alzheimer’s, binds to a cell-surface receptor called CD36, which causes decreased activity of the enzyme-soluble guanylate cyclase to reduce NO signaling. But that inhibitory effect required the presence of and interaction with CD47, another cell-surface protein, indicating that additional steps in the pathway remain to be identified.

“It’s possible that an agent that could block either CD36 or CD47 could slow the progress of neuronal degeneration in Alzheimer’s by protecting the production of NO in the brain,” Isenberg said.

“Importantly, we have already indentified therapeutic agents that can interrupt the inhibitory signal induced by these interac-
tions to maximize NO production, signal-
g, and sensitivity.”

He and his colleagues are currently studying such blockers in a variety of disease models. The research was funded by NCI and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.
Pitt Honors College Student Sesi Aliu Studies the Life He Lives

By Morgan Kelly

Pitt senior Sesi Aliu brings the sprawling subject of Africana Studies into better focus. Abstractly, it’s the study of disparate Black cultures worldwide loosely connected by resilient traditions and a shared sense of displacement and rediscovery.

Aliu, it’s his life: born in Nigeria, moved to the United States at 8, and raised in a household equally influenced by his Yoruba extraction and Texas environs. Now 21 and an Africana Studies and French major in Pitt’s Honors College (with certificates in global and African studies), Aliu studies and explores his native West Africa as well as the places its emigrés have settled.

“My story is one thread of the larger narrative of African communities everywhere,” Aliu said.

His story began in his hometown of Lagos, a place he remembers just well enough to make him realize how much more about it he wants to learn. Flashes of his neighborhood, 1970s skyscrapers encircled by colonial architecture, and the incessant energy of Africa’s second-largest city are all he has.

In 1997, Aliu’s parents won a U.S. State Department lottery to apply for a visa and moved him and his four siblings to Austin. Against the traditional narrative of the African Diaspora, they did not flee war nor was their move involuntary. But the indelible scars of Africa’s misfortunes meant the education and comfort Aliu’s parents wanted for their children were more likely to be had in the United States, he said.

“I don’t think there’s any doubt that it was for the best,” Aliu said. “Education in Nigeria is hard to come by without the money, and, even then, the quality is questionable. Besides, there are a lot of educated Nigerians whose degrees can’t get them a job. It’s safe to say my family’s life would have been a lot tougher had we stayed.”

His parents immersed the family into the local West African community—their closest friends were Nigerian, as is Aliu’s best friend. As in the majority of immigrant communities, the culture permeating his family’s home and its environs was all-encompassing. Aliu admits that his parents needed the cultural trappings of home a lot more. At 8 years old, his short life in Africa had not left him with a lot to miss. Instead, as Aliu got older, he started feeling he missed. “I felt there was a lot more I could know about my own culture,” he said. “For instance, I never learned Yoruba. My parents speak it, but I never needed to. I live in the United States because it was better for my family to leave Nigeria. My experience left me with a lot of questions about the world in general,” Aliu continued. “I thought about the legacies of colonialism, the chemistry of international relations, and differences in development and opportunities. I wondered how these issues resulted in the experience I shared with Africans around the world.”

A 2010 inductee into the Phi Beta Kappa honor society, Aliu has distinguished himself academically. He received a Humanity in Action summer fellowship in 2009, became a member of the Golden Key honor society in 2008, and was named a Helen S. Faison Scholar in 2007.

“In Spring 2010, I spent a semester in Senegal that illustrated the interplay of broad similarity and cultural specificity of Africana. Again, Aliu had memory flashes of Lagos: the colonial-era buildings, the streets filled with children, and the perseverance of an ancient culture. Just like home. Except that the predominant ethnicity is Wolof, and Islam is an entrenched feature of Senegalese life. And Senegal’s capital and largest city Dakar is home to roughly one-fourth the population of Lagos.

“I had this strong overall identification with Dakar at first, but as I lived there day to day I really noticed the differences,” Aliu said. “Senegal was quite similar to Nigeria on its surface, but the underlying atmosphere was totally different.”

(During a month in the summer of 2008 and another month in the summer of 2009, Aliu lived in Malawi as part of a student-led initiative to learn about and collaborate with community-based health and social service organizations in HIV-affected areas. He was too busy each time to take in much beyond the country’s suburban and rural villages, he said.)

The simultaneous feelings of kinship and contrasting cultural distinction he experienced in Senegal have encouraged Aliu to explore African cultures outside of Africa. He has applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to study sub-Saharan African immigrants in France, hoping to examine the traits they share with Africans elsewhere and those developed through their experience in France.

“As an African who left my home and was raised elsewhere, I think it’s important to understand how the African experience of slavery, Diaspora, and imperialism connects and influences these similar yet distinct communities throughout the world,” Aliu said. “What I’ve learned during my life and travels has taught me that.”

—Sesi Aliu

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—Sesi Aliu


**Exhibitions**


Hillman Library Latin American Lecture Room, 75th Anniversary of the University of Pittsburgh Press (UPP), selection of books representing the expanding range of UPP publications over the years, through Feb. 18, UPP and University Library System, 412-855-2058, mm@pq7.pitt.edu.


**Lectures/Seminars/Readings**

“The Absolute Arithmetic Continuum and Its Poincaré Counterpart,” Philip Ehrlich, professor of Philosophy, Knox University, 12:05 p.m. Feb. 15, 817R Cathedral of Learning, Lorchman Colloquium, Pitt Center for Philosophy of Science, 412-624-1052, pittcfs@pitt.edu.

“Audible Traces: Documenting Indian Prisoners of War in World War I Europe,” Neeta Majumdar, Pitt professor of English, noon Feb. 17, 4130 Puvvay Hall, Asia Over Lunch Series, Pitt Asian Studies Center, 412-648-7370, asia@pitt.edu.


**Miscellaneous**


**Opera/Theater/Dance**


**CAMELOT** by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, tale about the courage of King Arthur, the Beauty of Guinevere, and the chivalry of Sir Lancelot, through Feb. 19, Pittsburgh Public Theater, 621 Penn Ave., Downtown, 412-316-1600, www.ppt.org.

**Concerts**


Manhattan Transfer, Grammy Award-winning vocal quartet, 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 18, Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild Hall, 3615 Metropolitan St., Manches-


**PUBLICATION NOTICE** The next edition of *Pitt Chronicle* will be published Feb. 21. Items for publication in the newspaper’s *Happenings* calendar (this page) should be received at least two weeks prior to the event date. *Happenings* items should include the following information: title of the event, name and title of speaker(s), date, time, location, sponsor(s), and a phone number and Web site for additional information. Items may be e-mailed to chron@pitt.edu, faxed to 412-624-4895, or sent by campus mail to 422 Craig Hall. For more information, call 412-624-0033 or e-mail robinet@pitt.edu.