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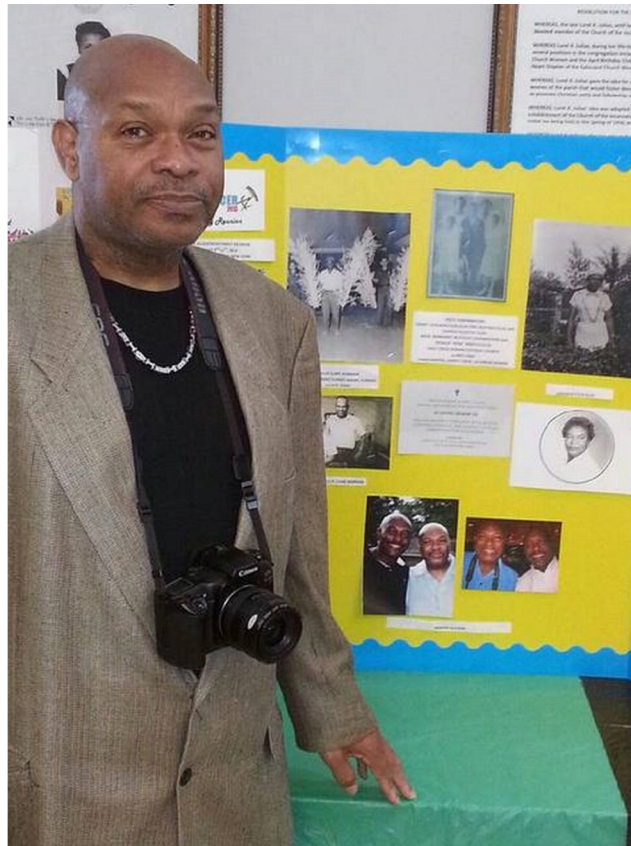
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Learn about African-American genealogy at Book Fair

BY DOROTHY JENKINS FIELDS - SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

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Marvin Ellis at The Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, 2014 inaugural "Tell Your Family Story" program exhibit.

Excitement is building as the opening of Miami Book Fair International 2014 approaches. Billed as the nation's finest and largest literary gathering, it is presented and produced by The Center for Literature and Theatre at Miami Dade College, Nov. 16-23.

A program of Miami Dade College's MDCulture, the Book Fair celebrates its 31st edition at MDC's Wolfson Campus in downtown Miami.

New to the Book Fair this year is the panel “In Search of Our Roots: Genealogy and the African Diaspora” at 4 p.m. Saturday in Room 8303, Building 8, third floor. This session is free.

Created and organized by Miami native Marvin Elliott Ellis, the inaugural panel is designed to encourage others in the community to research their family history and become interested in genealogy, studying the line of descent from ancestors.

“The most valuable advice I can offer others is don’t procrastinate,” Ellis said in an interview. “Begin immediately with what you know about yourself and your parents, then continue going back in time, generation by generation. You will be amazed at the discoveries you will find; and that genealogy is doable and can be fun.”

The featured panelists are knowledgeable researchers and published authors. Each will discuss and share the journey taken while discovering his or her ancestral heritage; and the research strategies implemented to achieve success throughout the process. There are six panelists and a moderator.

Panelist Elizabeth Shown Mills, a historical writer, has spent her career studying American ethnicities and developing research methodology to reconstruct families across place and time. She is the author of 13 books and nearly a thousand articles published in the fields of history, genealogy, sociology and literature.

Panelist Marva McClean, a creative writer, social justice educator and blogger, explores the healing power of writing and the central role it plays in exploring and shaping identity focusing on maroons and indigenous societies. The author of several books, she hosts the writing workshop “Seize the Pen & Write Yourself into History,” and continues to research the central role of Jamaica’s Nanny of the Maroons in the struggle for freedom across the Americas.

Panelist Nick Douglas writes about Creole through 400 years of history. He connects numerous large, prominent Creole families – their place in and contributions to Louisiana and American history and society.

Panelist Fatima Shaik is the author of five books of fiction set in Louisiana. Formerly a reporter for the Miami News and New Orleans Times-Picayne, currently she is writing a narrative history of the Economy Jazz Hall in New Orleans based on 3,000 pages of French handwritten journals.

Panelist Michael N. Henderson, family history researcher, author and lecturer, is a retired Navy lieutenant commander. His memoir, *Got Proof! My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation*, details his discovery of an enslaved ancestor who gained her freedom in Spanish colonial Louisiana in 1779. Henderson is the first and only African American member of the Georgia Society, Sons of the American Revolution. He is also a member of other lineage societies including the General Society of the War of 1812.

Panelist Marvin Elliot Ellis is a photographer and visual documentarian of the South Florida African Diaspora communities. He is a graduate of Miami Jackson Senior High School and New Orleans' Xavier University. Watching Alex Haley's *Roots* series and Henry Louis Gates' *Finding Your Roots* series, Ellis, like some other American's of West African descent, was inspired to research his family's history. He developed the idea for the panel after nearly three decades researching his African-American and Antillean Creole genealogy and family history.

For Ellis, genealogy has become a passion. He spends hours perusing census records, vintage photographs and communicating with relatives discovering the histories of his adopted and biological families. During his search it was revealed that his African-American paternal family is deeply rooted in the soil of Georgia's Wilkes and Taliaferro counties, while his Antillean maternal family is deeply rooted in the soil of Sainte-Croix, Danish/United States Virgin Islands, Barbados, and Antigua. Combined it is the Ellis-Spencer family.

His focus on genealogy and family history research highlights those who share a common ancestry. They are descendants of enslaved blacks from West and Central Africa who were shipped to the Americas by way of the Atlantic slave trade and relocated in the colonized West Indies and Caribbean islands.

Ellis continues the journey seeking to identify his paternal and maternal African ancestors who first arrived in the American South and the Caribbean, as well as his contemporary present day collateral relatives.

The panel discussion will be moderated by Anita Paul, known as the "Author's Midwife." She helps corporate professionals and entrepreneurs enhance their expertise, position their platform, and build their brand by becoming a published author. It is through her

“Write Your Own Life” Coaching Program that new authors overcome the struggles of writing, publishing, and marketing a book, and learn to leverage their book for success. The panel is open to the public.

Each year, the Miami Book Fair provides eight days of cultural and educational activities and fun for adults and children. There are Kitchen, demos and panels for food enthusiasts; more than 200 exhibitors from around the country selling books in a festive atmosphere; and hundreds of authors reading and discussing new books during the weekend Street Fair.

This year the Book Fair’s Board Chair, Mitchell Kaplan, announced that the 2014 winners of the prestigious National Book Award have been invited to attend. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is supporting this and other programs at the Book Fair that help make Miami a destination for writers and readers. Genealogy enthusiasts are encouraged to join this important cultural venture.

To view the schedule of events go to www.bookfair.com (<http://www.bookfair.com/>). For assistance call 305-237-3258 or email wbookfair@mdc.edu (<mailto:wbookfair@mdc.edu>).

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