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## Gardner '89 Publishes Book on Civil War-Era African American Literature

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## Gardner '89 Publishes Book on Civil War-Era African American Literature

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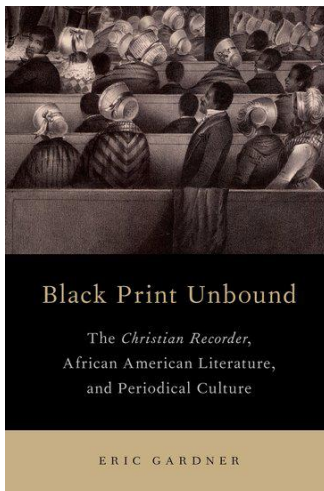
BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan University alumnus Eric Gardner '89 has published *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2015), a book shedding new light on printed communication among African Americans during and immediately following the Civil War.

*Black Print Unbound* explores the development of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) newspaper, the *Christian Recorder*, the oldest black periodical of the United States dating to the pre-Civil War era. According to Gardner, the book “is the most detailed study of the subscribers—and likely readers—of an early Black publication ever shared.” Gardner particularly wanted to investigate the individual lives of those who subscribed to the publication, looking into their lives and what reading and subscribing to the *Recorder* might have meant, he said.

Gardner, an English professor at Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU) in Michigan, began his research as a result of teaching literature courses at SVSU that examined American literature from the 1800s as well as African-American writing.



Eric Gardner '89 consulted a former IWU faculty member, Pamela Muirhead, in researching his new book.



To complete his research, Gardner tapped into connections with Illinois Wesleyan. Pamela Muirhead '68, an associate professor of English (now retired) at Illinois Wesleyan, and her husband Jack Muirhead '62 have been involved in the Bloomington-Normal Black History Collection Project and helped plan *Presence, Pride & Passion, A History of African-Americans in McLean County*, an exhibit at the McLean County Museum of History. Gardner said the Muirheads shared their relevant knowledge on those topics for the book.

He wrote the book with support of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The book is a culmination of archival work following his award-winning book *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

Gardner graduated from Illinois Wesleyan with a major in **English**. He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and has been a member of the SVSU English faculty since 1996. Gardner has published with the *African American Review* and edited *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West*, a compilation of Carter's work from a post-Civil War era African-American newspaper.

By Lydia Hartlaub '16