Archiving the Black Web: A National Forum to Map the Landscape, Define the Issues, & Plan a Strategy for Documenting the Black Experience Online

Grant: National Leadership | **Category**: National Forum | **Organization**: African American Research Library and Cultural Center

Introduction

The African American Research Library and Cultural Center (AARLCC)[1], in partnership with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Spelman College Archives, Auburn Avenue Research Library, Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center, and the African American Museum and Library at Oakland, requests $150,000 from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to fund *Archiving the Black Web: A National Forum to Map the Landscape, Define the Issues, and Plan a Strategy for Documenting the Black Experience Online.*

Statement of National Need and Impact

Black People in the United States, Africa[2], the Caribbean, and the rest of the Diaspora have a long history of participating in online spaces[3] and continue to be important drivers of culture on the web[4]. This is especially true on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, where research[5] has shown, that despite lower levels of access to broadband and the internet, Black people participate on the platforms at higher levels than other demographic groups. Black people use the Web in unique ways[6] to create and share culture, and to amplify and generate support for social justice issues such as ending police violence and prison abolition. This presents new opportunities and challenges for archivists, scholars, and other memory workers interested in documenting the Black experience online. Over the past twenty-five years, the practice and theories of web and social media archiving has evolved primarily within national libraries and resource rich academic institutions, whose projects are internally focused[7] and demonstrate limited interest in prioritizing diversity and local communities. At the same time, organizations that focus primarily on archiving the history of Black people (community-based archives[8], small museums, historical societies, HBCUs, and urban public libraries, etc.) are at a disadvantage when it comes to collecting historical content from the web and social media in order to expand their research collections. The historical lack of resources to fund technical skill building and necessary resources to support technology infrastructure significantly restricts opportunities for these institutions to both recover traces of Black history still existing online and to preserve the Black experience on the web in the future. However, following on the promise of previous efforts such as the Digital Blackness in the Archive[9] symposium hosted by the Documenting the Now[10] project, the *National Forum on Archiving the Black Web* seeks to highlight and address the opportunities and challenges of placing Black history collecting institutions at the center of the future of archiving the Black experience online. These cultural heritage spaces, because of their long history of documenting the Black experience, established reputation built through trust from community engagement, and a long-standing commitment to care ethics and human centered documentation, are perfectly placed to lead the archiving of content about Black people on the web.

---

[1] http://www.broward.org/Library/Pages/BranchDetails.aspx?branchInfo=1

[2] TMS Ruge, *How the African Diaspora is using Social Media to Influence Development*, The Guardian, February 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/feb/06/african-diaspora-social-media-tms-ruge

[3] Everett, Anna, Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace, Suny Press, 2009.

[4] Clark, M. D. (2015, December 31) To Tweet Our Own Cause: A Mixed-Methods Exploration of the Online Phenomenon 'Black Twitter' (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014) [Abstract] Retrieved from https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:1318a434-c0c4-49d2-8db4-77c6a2cbb8b1; Meredith Clark, #BlackTwitter, https://medium.com/informed-and-engaged/black-twitter-9a95550773c8

[5] https://www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/06/detailed-demographic-tables/

[6] Steele, C.K. (2012) Blogging While Black: a critical analysis of resistance discourse by black female bloggers, Selected papers of internet research. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org/index.php/spir/article/view/31; Brock, André. (2012). From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. 56. 529-549. 10.1080/08838151.2012.732147.

[7] https://osf.io/ht6ay/

[8] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FpOjXzCLiRsdt7nBT271C6xHhwE0Odx-/view

[9] https://www.docnow.io/meetings/stl-2017/

[10] https://news.docnow.io/

Project Design
The key activities of the forum will be two national meetings and one workshop to be held in the winter of 2020 and spring of 2021. Makiba Foster, Executive Director of the AARLCC will serve as Project Director and Bergis Jules, Project Director for Documenting the Now, will serve as Project Advisor. Invited attendees for the forums will be cultural heritage workers in the United States and abroad whose work focuses on collecting Black history materials including community-based archives, archives in museums and public libraries, historical societies that collect archives, and archives in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The forums will include a combination of keynote talks, panel presentations, and design thinking sessions. In conjunction with the second workshop in the spring, we will also host a full day web archiving workshop to be led by staff from the Documenting the Now project[11]. Invited speakers will write a blog post on a forum-related topic before each meeting and those blog posts will be published on the Sustainable Futures blog[12]. Forum activities will produce a publicly accessible white paper generated from content during the panel presentations, keynotes, and design thinking sessions. The development of a strategic plan to outline a path forward for Black cultural heritage organizations interested in web archiving, including sections addressing cost, technology, skill building, ethics, etc. Lastly, draft a framework to define the goals and resources necessary for the development of a Black Web Archives Collective, which will be a resource sharing, advocacy, and support network for Black Cultural Heritage Organizations interested in building collections from the web and social media.

Diversity Plan
Project staff recognize that the archives profession has disproportionately not collected history about Black people from the web and social media and that the highly ephemeral nature of these materials puts them at risk of being lost forever or not being collected at all. To that end, *Archiving the Black Web* seeks to focus specifically on strategies for collecting and preserving Black history online. All the partner organizations involved in the project will primarily collect Black history materials and the strategies designed during the forums will be informed by issues that specifically relate to the Black experience on the web and the needs of Black collecting institutions.

Deliverables
The deliverables for this project will be two meetings and a workshop, 10 blog posts from invited speakers and keynotes, a white paper, a plan addressing future collecting from the Black Web, draft framework for the Black Web Archives Collective, listserv for Black cultural heritage organizations, community web archiving event during Archives Week 2021, and a project website.

Budget Summary
We are requesting $150,000 to support meeting planning, travel, lodging, meals, and live streaming. Funds will also cover stipends for keynotes, invited panelists, the project advisor, conference travel for the project director, and a design thinking consultant who will lead several activities during the meetings.
- Full Day Workshop (Space, Technology, Stipends, Travel, Lodging, Meals (2 people)- $7,500
- Lodging, Travel, & Meal Stipends for 50 Attendees + Project Staff (2 meetings)- $88,000
- Honoraria and Travel, Lodging, Meals for Invited Panelists & Keynotes (12 people) 19,000
- Design Thinking Consultant (travel, meals, lodging, & fee x 2 meetings) - $12,000
- Stipend and Travel for Project Advisor and Project Director -$16,000
- Project Management (5% indirect cost) - $7500

---

[11] https://www.docnow.io/
[12] https://medium.com/community-archives