

STATION **4**  
PERSONAL & COMMUNITY  
ARCHIVING

# Toward an Archival Reckoning

What would it mean for historians and archivists to not just curate and write about the past but also confront it? To address how the disciplining structures of the archive and the profession entrench inequality even as we attempt to be inclusive, attend to the ways in which erasure is an integral part of professional standards, and acknowledge how repositories replicate oppression? How do we reckon with the unsavory origin stories of archives on which we base our social justice histories or the individualism embedded in preserving collaboratively constructed artifacts?

Such questions are daunting yet vital. There are many who are thoughtfully interrogating these challenging and complex concerns. One such group is the Blackivists—a collective of trained Black archivists who prioritize Black cultural heritage preservation and memory work.

This collective works with individuals and communities to increase access to historical materials and address the labor practices and relationships around “creation, care, description and access” to archives. “Toward an Archival Reckoning” is a coauthored, collaborative project that foregrounds the Blackivists’ work in three parts: a conversation with members about the challenges and possibilities of the profession and archiving, a case study on the Blackivists’ collaboration with the Chicago-based collective Honey Pot Performance, and a call to action for guidance on how to address some of the pressing issues in archiving and historical preservation today.

Serious engagement in questions of preservation, memorialization, and repair means interrogating the full scope of our preservation practices, educating ourselves on existing efforts, and considering how we can materially and constructively support and amplify those already engaged in this work. There is no one way to address the oppressive practices and procedures that have often come to define historical preservation and research. However, the conversation, case study, and call to action that follow offer an opening to rethink and reimagine how curation can lead to creative and communal historical creation.

Ashley D. Farmer

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## A Conversation with the Blackivists

**Ashley Farmer (AF):** Could we start by having everyone introduce themselves—talk about where they work and kind of how they are a part of the archivist community?

**Tracy Drake:** I’m the director of Special Collections and Archives at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. As an undergrad, I interned at the Chicago History Museum’s Archives. My supervisor took me under her wing and showed me the archives. I started my career at the Chicago Public Library working in the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection, which was sort of like a coming home for me because I am from the South Side of Chicago, but also because I visited the archive to research the Great Migration and document other Black experiences in Chicago. And so, to go back there to work with those materials was one of the best experiences I could ever have. I was truly excited about it and spent the first month nerding out over all of the material that I got to touch.

**Steven Booth:** I’m the archivist / project manager for the Johnson Publishing Company Archive, working specifically for the Getty Research

Frontis: The Chicago Black Social Culture Map Archiving Day event that took place at Links Hall, Chicago, IL on September 29, 2018. This image includes a handwritten sign that reads “Station 4: Personal and Community Archiving.” Handwritten signs were placed throughout the venue and used to direct attendants to the proper station for specific information pertaining to donating information or obtaining services. (Photo credit: M Thrè Photography/Honey Pot Performances).

Institute and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. I've been a practicing archivist for thirteen years now, and my entry point into the profession was while studying music at Morehouse College. And so, similar to Tracy, I did an internship, eventually went to grad school. I've worked on the Dr. King papers at Boston University, worked for the National Archives for about eleven years processing Al Gore's and Dick Cheney's vice presidential records, and relocated back to Chicago to be the audiovisual archivist for the Barack Obama Presidential Library.

**Stacie Williams:** I am the division chief for Archives and Special Collections at the Chicago Public Library. I've had the position since December 2020. I did my degree in archives and management at Simmons College, but what really happened while I was there was that I had the privilege of doing that program with a lot of Black students. A lot is seven. All seven of us were in it, so very much supporting each other in terms of intellectual engagement, supporting each other around jobs and things like that. All of the jobs essentially came through those connections and those friendships and that support. I always had a very natural, organic interest in Black history specifically, but I was a journalist for many years before becoming an archivist. As a journalist, I was a features writer for a long time before I became a copyeditor, so I was really used to engaging with primary-source documents. I spent time at courthouses, spent time in historical societies when I would be doing investigative stories or long-form features stories, so I think being able to marry that type of exploration to something that felt firmly rooted in Black liberation and Black history is, I think, the intersection that I find myself at—and looking at how technology ties it all together.

**Raquel Flores-Clemons:** I'm the university archivist and director of University Archives, Records Management, and Special Collections at Chicago State University. My entry point into the profession and the archivist community started during undergrad. My first couple of years of undergrad were at Howard University studying art history. I always had an interest in history, and particularly Black history and visual culture. Through the different projects that I started in the program, I began to more succinctly build my understanding of the connection between primary sources, the need for representation in these spaces that hold primary sources to better tell our stories, and the importance of visual and material culture in doing so. In 2004, I transferred to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and I was still on the art history track but started working at the local library. For every student that the public library took on for a graduate assistantship or some type of volunteer or internship opportunity, the graduate program in library and information science at U of I offered free courses for one of their employees. In 2008, I was fortunate enough to be a recipient of that opportunity, and I was very intentional in selecting courses that married my two interests

of history and visual and material culture. I knew what the work of an archivist was in theory, but I didn't have a name for it at that point. One of the courses in which I was enrolled was an archival arrangement and description course, which was taught in the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music at the University of Illinois. It was just a wonderful experience. It was a theory and practice course where I was able to process band uniforms, musical cylinders, performance sheets, and other musical-performance ephemera. That tangible experience made me realize that this is something I can do that combined my different interests. I became very specific in wanting to do this work to document and preserve Black culture and history as well as the histories of communities of color, because I knew very quickly when I engaged with primary sources that we were not always well represented in those spaces and collections. I understood the need for us to be represented in the profession as well as in the materials themselves. So, that was my entry point, and I was just chasing the dream from that point on, blooming where I was planted. I had different internships. I did an internship at the State Farm Archive in Bloomington and worked as an independent contractor for various organizations. In those various opportunities, I was always looking for Black folks. I'm fortunate to work at Chicago State documenting and preserving the history of a predominantly Black institution.

**AF:** What was the impetus behind forming the Blackivists collective?

**Stacie Williams:** You know, I feel like I can answer maybe because I was one of the last people to get to town. Perhaps the official first meeting of the Blackivists was February or March 2018?

**Steven Booth:** February, because it was really cold.

**Stacie Williams:** Yes. So yeah, this idea that, at that particular point in time, on that particular day, we were, like, all in town, and it was like, "Let's everybody get together at the Promontory," and I think while we were there, of course it was just like talking and a lot of camaraderie ... There were so many Black archivists there that night. When I left Chicago, it definitely didn't look like that. The Vivian Harsh collection that Tracy mentioned was—at least for much of that time and at the time that I actually started library school—run by a white male. So much of what was known about Black history as it related to the Chicago Public Library was very tied to the person [Michael Flug] who ran the collection. So, I think, at least on my end, I was looking around and being like, "Wow. We've got an abundance, all these folks who are at all these institutions—like, we could do big things together." And then through that, [Blackivist] Skyla [Hearn] had shared with us that she was working on the Honey Pot [Performance] project, and I think it started out of a casual invitation like, "Hey, you all, I'm doing this. Anybody wanna come with me and help ... with this project? Work some booths or do some digitization?" And



from that point on, I think as we were working together, we really started thinking of the group as a more ... I think as an actual group that we could put a name on and say specifically, “We have come together to specifically do these things and help make Black history discoverable.”

**AF:** So, how many people were at the initial meeting? And then how big is the collective now?

**Steven Booth:** There were two meetings. Before that February 2018 meeting, there was a 2017 meeting, and there were about twelve or thirteen of us. At the February 2018 meeting, there were about eight of us sitting at the table. But the collective is made up of six individuals. To piggyback off what Stacie said, there’s also some friendly little banter between us and our colleagues that live in Atlanta and New York. So, we were really also trying to establish ourselves and stand out by letting them know that Chicago has Black archivists too. For the longest time, they kept giving us a bunch of grief, like, “Oh, no one is in Chicago.” But we had these meetups and were like, “Wow. We really are in Chicago.” It’s a friendly rivalry between Chicago and Atlanta.

**Stacie Williams:** And with that, part of what also makes it just fun or interesting is that some of the folks in Atlanta were also part of that Simmons group. Steven went to Simmons, for instance, but he finished a year before me. It was like it didn’t matter. His presence was still very there. I got there, and everyone was like, “You have to meet Steven Booth. You absolutely must get in touch.” There are folks who are part of this journey who I met at the very beginning of my archivist career, my grad-school career, who are part of this now. I met with Raquel living in Kentucky—really random. She was in Kentucky finishing her fellowship as I was coming off maternity leave.

**Raquel Flores-Clemons:** That was interesting because I think Stacie was close to being my supervisor, but she gave birth early. But, yes, I did the Career Enhancement Program through the Association of Research Libraries, and the University of Kentucky was the site that I was assigned to. On my last day of that program, I met Stacie. But that also shows how much Black archivists really supported each other because Stacie extended support, offering to stay connected. I’ve always felt that especially among our people that there was a true genuine support and wanting to see people grow and really thrive in the profession. Even though we only had seen each other that one time on my last day, we stayed connected. It just seemed like an ideal time to do something. We knew that this was a special time because many of us were returning back to Chicago around the same time within a two-year span ... Skyla [Hearn] had always been here. I stayed in Champaign for fourteen years, and I actually met Tracy there because we both were in the same graduate program. We were also in the same scholarship program, LAMP [Library and Information Science

Access Midwest Program]. But all, within two years, returned to the city. Tracy came back to Chicago; then I moved back to Chicago. [Blackivist] Erin [Glasco] was already in Chicago. We all met each other in different circles, conferences, and that sort of thing. With Stacie coming back, Steven had recently returned, we all realized that we are all in this city at the same time—it seemed like an opportune time to work together. When I came back, I was looking for opportunities in Chicago particularly to connect with Black archivists. The opportunity really wasn't there prior to all of us returning. We wanted to take advantage because we didn't know how long we were all going to be in this space together.

Also, I realized there were limitations within the organizations that we worked in. Some of these histories and narratives that are not represented in the archives—in academic institutions or cultural heritage institutions—are not there for a reason. They are not there either because community members may not realize that the story is important enough to document and have in those institutions or because community members may know that their story is important but don't want their story there for various reasons. But the work still has to be done of figuring out a way that we can also be a resource to community members who want to document their history, who have these wonderful collections that tell a story about a particular organization or a moment in time. We all may know about a particular history collectively in our different circles, like the Honey Pot Performance [HPP] project. House music is just a noted thing in Chicago, but you know, we all have our connection with house music and culture in various ways. HPP was doing actual work to document it in a very tangible way. So, being able to support that effort was a reminder of the type of work that we wanted to do or see in our organizations but couldn't for different reasons, whether it was respectability politics, whether it was funding, whether it was because different organizations don't trust certain institutions. This all can hinder filling in and expanding important histories in the city. We are very happy that Skylia allowed us to be a part of the HPP project. Knowing that the work has to be done, it's great to have something to offer to the community that we may not be able to offer in the same vein being under the helm of an institution.

**AF:** I'd love to hear a little more about why you felt such a thing was necessary. I mean, you're talking about the limitations to be able to do this kind of work in the places from within different institutions. I think a lot of historians and perhaps other archivists don't really understand what those limitations are and why such a collective like this is needed.

**Stacie Williams:** I've been managing a program in archives or facilitating some type of program almost since I started in the field. Started with an undergraduate research fellowship program at the University of Kentucky and then moved from there to managing digital scholarship programs and now managing Archives and Special Collections at Chicago Public Library. One of the things that we know for a fact in terms of the collective limitations for Black archivists is simply our abilities to be in pipelines that allow

us into decision-making roles. By and large—and I will say this was true for me even when I got my first library job—you’re working really, really hard just to try to get a foot in the door, but there’s not necessarily a lot of infrastructure and support that helps guide you along advancement in the field (outside of scholarship programs). It’s usually something that happens because some individual person took an interest in you or thought you were cool. Like the idea that I was managing departments for digital scholarship when there were very few front-facing Black women or women of color doing that technical work, and it really was just random that someone gave me a chance to prove that I could do that.

I’d say there are more folks in those spaces and more of them growing, but if I’m looking in a room of, like, ARL [Association of Research Libraries] or Ivy Plus—they have their groups for digital scholarship or for archives—those rooms all generally look the same way, the same types of folks making the same types of decisions about collections, creating the same types of priorities on budgets, who [they] are approaching for donors, programming, all of it. I saw it at least on my end, and I’ll say it got very personal. I took a job here when I first got back to town, and ... I was not being given the things that I needed to really succeed in that job. It was an incredibly hostile environment, and so being able to do this sort of concurrent work within the Blackivists at that time was almost lifesaving. It also allowed me to do the work that I knew I was trying to do, make the decisions that I knew I was trying to make but was not being given the opportunities to make at that time.

And also being able to work with people that think in ways that did not feel as extractive or problematic as I had come to see in academic work. I don’t want to paint all universities with one brush, but that was a place where I did not feel great about how some of those decisions were being made. Or about my ability to try to effect change. I think that’s a really, really big part of this. That’s something that people should also understand. When decisions are being made, you’re looking around at archives, and you’re thinking, “Well, here’s collections. Somebody made those decisions, somebody sat in a meeting with people and said, ‘We are going to use our resources to buy this collection or to digitize this collection or to hire this person.’” And ... our profession is 88 percent white women. The decisions are looking the same. At least for me, that was a really big piece of why I think moving with the collective felt so meaningful and what some of those limitations are. So, if we’re working with clients, sometimes we’re making recommendations on staffing or making recommendations on how they should consider their long-term collection-management policies or their long-term digital infrastructure. All of us on the call are all now in decision-making positions, but in terms of what we look like extrapolated on the field as a whole, we are tiny. We are a tiny group of people who get to make decisions like that.

**Tracy Drake:** What I’ve realized working with donors and patrons as a person from within the institution is that we use a lot of jargon. Sometimes,



I'm not sure that we are clear on the messaging to donors and giving them the time needed to fully understand the archival process. There are limitations within our institutions on what we are able to do as it relates to capacity, time, and sometimes even being consistent [in our practices]. What I've found is that in our capacity as the Blackivists, we were able to eliminate a lot of our jargon and help people understand in real and meaningful ways the importance of documenting this history. I also think about the five tips that we released to help [donors] understand very basic legal jargon in a deed of gift [and consider different questions]: What am I handing over? What am I giving up? What am I receiving in return? I think that in those very meaningful ways, we were able to really change the dynamic, the power structure, and the ways in which people thought about preserving history and why Black narratives are so important. For me, that became a crucial part of the work—taking the time to create meaningful connections with people, which sometimes our institutions and our jobs don't allow. For some of our relationships, it takes a year or two before you get full trust, and I'm not sure by the designation of our institutions that the system is set up for us to arrange it that way. You usually get one or two meetings, maybe, with a donor, and then that's it.

**AF:** I'm really glad you brought this up, because too often historians and researchers don't have a clear indication of the donation process. Would you be willing to share more about the processes of acquiring materials? Specifically, I am wondering how the Blackivists collective works to mitigate extraction and exploitation in the donation process.

**Tracy Drake:** I think that, for me, that's where the people-centered approach to archiving and working with the community comes in. We prioritize people over items any day. That it's not [only] about taking things but also about how we should think about what we are giving [in return] to the communities in which we are working. So, looking at our communities and thinking about it in terms of "We are actually here to learn and listen to you." And taking that approach is very valuable and informs the work we do. I'm not necessarily sure we do that from an institutional standpoint, because the approach in a lot of institutions is actually to just take, take, take. I think when you're thoughtful and intentional and you consider the people first, the folks who create this knowledge and materials, then you come in with a different mindset. Also, you're more receptive, and you get a better reception from the folks you are collecting materials from.

**Raquel Flores-Clemons:** Also, often when collections come into institutions, there may not be a continued connection with the donor, content creator, or the community from which the collection came. That can mean that there is no longer any communication or conversations between the content creator and/or the community in which that collection was created and the institution that will steward the collection.

What it does is put institutions as well as archivists in a position of taking, extracting, and not necessarily giving anything back to the community. We also have to be mindful of the institution and the funds that we steward to support the work to get these things processed. The problem with that is that oftentimes the money is not always there to do the work of cataloging and processing collections, and this can stifle promoting histories and hinder community-relations efforts as well. In an institution, it can be challenging to keep a people-first approach because you have to prioritize the needs of the organization that holds the collection. Donors' social status may also impact access, and if a collection is donated with funding—which is ideal but not often the case—then that collection may become processed and available more quickly than another collection. Or there may be significant events in the organization's history that must be highlighted, which may require the archivist to divert all attention and resources to commemorating that event. However, that does not mean that the collection's ability to be available more quickly meets community needs at the time or that it is relevant to current conversations happening in our world.

With the Blackivists, we are able to do the work we want to do without the constraints that may present in an institution, by engaging directly with the community to highlight and preserve underdocumented histories that are relevant and specific to us. We work alongside community members, recognizing that our credentials do not deem us as the experts of the community's knowledge and experience. We are able to say, "You're the expert. We are learning from you. We have this particular skill set that we can share to preserve these materials and that history those materials reflect so that people will know about it, but at the end of the day, you hold the knowledge. And we come alongside you." A lot of times when donors donate to institutions, that knowledge is kind of cut off if the institution is not intentional about maintaining a relationship beyond a collection's deposit.

When we represent the institution, there is this automatic expectation that we know everything, and that's not always the case. The stewarding organization may want us to present it that way since they are the ones funding the work. That can create problems when we think about accessibility to certain histories and certain narratives, because an organization may operate in a way that does not prioritize Black people, communities of color, or other marginalized people. With the Blackivists, we get to set that priority. But we get to do it with the community and let the community know that their histories are important. The work that you've done is important, and it doesn't always have to come into certain institutions to be deemed important. That's another thing that I think oftentimes hinders what historical narratives are preserved and highlighted, because the general public often thinks if a collection is within a well-known organization, then that makes it more important, and that's not the case. Some of the most important histories haven't even been documented and told yet. It's also worth keeping in mind the type of relationship that the

institution has with the community, because you will have people who know that they have done some great work for the community or city, have materials that document it, and have other organizations chomping at the bit to get the collection. But that individual or organization has a very troubled relationship with a particular local institution. Researchers may come across certain collections that seem misplaced, like, Why is this collection that is very Chicago-centric in an institution in California? Some of those things—donor relations, funding, institution name recognition—may be at play and directly impact accessibility for research and engagement. There are also institutions that do not engage enough with the community to care about what is happening in the community, so they never ask or never approach community members or particular organizations that have done important work and may have these great histories to be told—they don't deem them important enough to even approach the creator to ask about them for it or to ask them, "How can we partner with you to make sure that your story is preserved and told?" These are some of the barriers and limitations. These are not even high-level intellectual notions. This is simply about relationships, respecting people, respecting individual cultures and community members, and respecting the knowledge that is there. That's a part of all of this conversation.

**AF:** I'm wondering if you might share with us examples of some of the work that the collective has done that you are especially proud of using this people-first model.

**Stacie Williams:** I'm really proud about the work we came out [with] last year with our partner, Sixty Inches From Center, on a series of guidelines activists could take who were trying to protect and preserve their materials. This was in the wake of the uprisings last summer [2020] after George Floyd's murder. We understood because we had been in contact with colleagues across the industry—for instance, the folks who work at Witness.org; Witness is a human rights–documentation organization that trains people on how to safely capture and document human rights violations. So, we knew that there were best practices floating around from colleagues who also work with activists. I think we were really surprised about the response. So many people engaged with it or thought what we were saying was useful and thought that it would be uniformly helpful to capturing and documenting this very specific slice of Black history that was happening that summer. But also do it in ways that would provide them safety. We understand that it is more than just standing outside and holding your phone. You, too, can be at risk ... so wanting to make sure that folks who are also taking steps to document that work are keeping themselves safe and also doing things to keep the documentation safe so that people know.

**Tracy Drake:** I don't have a specific project. But I think, building on what Stacie said, we also see ourselves as a part of these communities.

We are in service to these communities, but we come from them. Coming from that understanding that we're protecting our neighbors, the people who live within the confines of our neighborhood. The fact that there isn't a separation between us and the community, I believe, becomes an important aspect of the work that came out of the five tips and the partnership with Sixty Inches that ultimately led to the visibility of the Blackivists. I'm proud of all the work we do.

**Steven Booth:** That's also why we're invited to collaborate with so many different organizations. We are invited into these spaces. We are not necessarily going out seeking work. All of the partners we have worked with have come directly from relationships that members of the Blackivists have or through other connections. Often it's two degrees of separation. Our work with the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party came through Tracy, us working with Honey Pot came through Skyla, us working with CTJM [Chicago Torture Justice Memorials] came through Stacie. And all have different relationships with [cofounder] Tempestt [Hazel] ... That's how we became involved with Sixty [Inches from Center]. We are always invited into these spaces because we understand, having seen how our institutions and other ones work, that we don't want to perpetuate harm and wrongdoing, especially when we are a part of these communities. We live in them. And we know that these histories, narratives, and materials are unique and distinct to Black Chicago and equally worthy to be documented. For whatever reason, institutions here don't consider Black archives valuable until it benefits them. Because we're cognizant of this, I think that is why we are really adamant about having conversations with groups about what it is they would like to do and seeing how we can best assist them with their goals. All of the projects are great. I don't have a favorite.

**Raquel Flores-Clemons:** I don't have a favorite project either. But what I value the most is that we are excavating these community or organizational histories that may not be widely known. Oftentimes you see in an organization's history, for example, this top-down effect. The top names that folks will recognize are the ones that are well documented in organizations and in different spaces. But it's the community members who are doing great work as well and are creating history every day that often support larger organizations' and community efforts. That's what I'm most proud of. That we are working with community members that may not be known by others but whose work is very important to various aspects of our community and community-building efforts, whether it is documenting things that are happening in the neighborhood or doing social justice work within the communities, bringing specific community issues to the forefront. The work that community members are doing creates a record, creates a document that records an activity that gives insight into cultures of those neighborhoods. As with

the HPP, supporting efforts that capture the creation of social cultural spaces so that people can feel affirmed and free in their being gets me excited about our work because that's when I see us, a fuller array of Black people. That's when I see myself represented in this space. We need that. We need to see a fuller spectrum of ourselves represented in history. We live in a city that was founded by a Black man, yet it's only been in recent years that conversations and true efforts to adequately honor that fact have happened. The unfortunate truth is that historical records and markers in the city do not always point to that fact. Jean-Baptiste Pointe DuSable's name being in the forefront now is a recent phenomenon that's largely due to national efforts and conversations around (racist) public monuments and correcting history. It gives me joy to see us be a part of unearthing how Black folks have contributed to the life, culture, and history of this city and beyond.

**Tracy Drake:** I also think that one way in which we see that at my institution—that's not unique to this institution but [in fact at] all the institutions I worked at—is when researchers or students come in and they ask questions about specific topics and I'm like, "I don't think these papers exist." These people lived, they were here, but these stories don't exist in any archival record. But because we were also a part of those communities, at certain times, we knew who was involved in that work. If it wasn't a collecting priority of our institution or there was deterioration of material because those relationships didn't exist between our institution [and the community], then we [the Blackivists] had a connection—whether that was a direct connection to somebody who had the records or that was through somebody else, a secondary connection. I felt like it was important because we already knew what stories were missing, and we knew what communities to go to and get those from or the folks that needed to be talked to, who we needed to connect ourselves with to get those narratives. For me, I always felt that it was important to also understand what narratives are missing because we are a part of these communities. That's also at the forefront of this work that we are doing.

**AF:** What do you wish historians understood about being an archivist?

**Stacie Williams:** It just bears repeating that in 2021, you can't put a stack of money next to a box of collections and expect the box to digitize itself. It's very hard to get this work done when the core groups involved have really different expectations around what is being given and what comes out of the giving. It is really challenging to keep this work going in a forward-thinking manner if we have to source it based on, quite honestly, eighteenth-century funding models.

**Tracy Drake:** I mean, that's real, too, because I get researchers who come in three years later and are like, "You still haven't processed that



collection?” And I’m like, “I don’t have five people in the back!” It’s a department of two, and there’s a lot of intensive invisible labor that goes into the actual work of processing a collection. I don’t think that there is an understanding between parties—historians and archivists and even the public as well—about that labor. There is a lot of intellectual and physical labor that goes into the work, and I’m not sure as archivists that we’ve done a great job of explaining what that labor looks like. And so, it just goes unnoticed. When historians or researchers come into the archives, they just see the finished product, and they don’t actually think about how we get to this. Even like you were saying, just from the point of acquiring all the way to the end product, there is a bunch of labor that has to be done to get it there.

**Raquel Flores-Clemons:** Adding to that, I have had scholars that were upset that I wouldn’t open the archive during the pandemic to the point where they sent angry emails to executive leadership. When we’re in the pandemic, we’re all in the pandemic. That is not an opportunity for special privileges to get into someone’s archives. If you are not working in your institution during a pandemic, why are you expecting me to be in this space?

**AF:** Do you find that being Black or being one of the only Black people working in a particular space compounds this lack of understanding between researchers and archivists?

**Stacie Williams:** That’s huge. I would say I have had experiences, and this did happen more frequently down south, but it has happened up north, where Black researchers seemed unaccustomed to seeing us in there and occasionally presumed our incompetence or lack of subject specialty. And I get that ... Those folks have been doing their research for many years. There’s probably an entire generation of researchers who never saw a Black archivist. I grew up in a city that’s mostly Black, and I never saw a Black archivist until I went to graduate school. But the one thing I wanted to add is that I think it would behoove us all to remember original founding meetings and allyship with each other. [Historians and archivists] were all kicking it, and then at a certain point, a group of people decided to start the SAA [Society of American Archivists], feeling like perhaps the more technical aspects of the work, labor, and processing needed to be addressed separately from the research concerns of historians. But really we were moving along the same river path. We should constantly be looking for ways to work well together to make our work more efficient together and not have redundancy, not fighting over these little resources. Academics, if you are getting grants with anything involving the word “archiving,” please don’t launch those without your university library’s knowledge. If we had designed it in partnership, we probably could have made it last a lot longer for you, and it wouldn’t have to be this later panicked reaction.

Let's all work together better from the start because we started out together.

**AF:** What would be your advice for historians looking to foster better relationships with archivists and also better relationships with the communities they study and record?

**Raquel Flores-Clemons:** One thing I will say that relates to something Stacie just said about connecting with the librarians and archivists of your organization is to also think about being willing to wrap in processing and preserving the collection in those grants. Oftentimes you may have to research an unprocessed collection. The barrier a lot of times to processing a collection is the funding. There's just not enough people to do the work, and there's not enough funding to fund the folks to do the work. In addition to that, I would also encourage historians to think about wrapping in digitization [to funding] as well. It costs money to digitize. It can't be stressed enough. It costs money to do this work. There is work to archiving and to preserving as well as to accessing materials in the way that you want. So, think from a user perspective. How would you want to engage with these materials to do your research? What would make it easier for you to do the work that you're trying to do? If that means sitting at your computer to review a document when you can't come into the space to research, then think about that process for yourself and how you can then include that in building grants and what work needs to happen to do your work. That's one action item that I would recommend.

**Tracy Drake:** I wonder if there is a way to rethink this entire process. If our work is so intertwined, which we know it is, one is dependent on another, maybe we should rethink the end product not as the finding aid but as the publications. Of course, there are collections that folks won't write about right away, but then maybe it's about building relationships. Maybe we should build relationships with historians early, have conversations often, and think about the end product of what happens with the archives not as the finding aid but also as the end product of their research. We need to see all of that as a continuum.

**AF:** I think you're absolutely right. And I think historians are so focused on the end goal of the publication that we are not thinking about all of the steps involved in processing a collection. The markers of success in the profession are individual publications versus a community ethos. This often leads to thinking about seeing the materials first versus collecting with an eye toward community and care.

**Tracy Drake:** That's also a by-product of academia and white supremacy, which is built into our institutions.

**AF:** Yes. It is something we have to actively combat. What final thoughts or insights would you like to leave us with?

**Stacie Williams:** The one that I am actually really geeked about, we're just starting it. We agreed among ourselves that it would be a good idea to get a mediator on the heels of a project that Steven and I did together called Loss/Capture, where we had the opportunity to interview a lot of different people involved in the art scene here and the long-term preservation of Black history. In that interview, we spoke with an elder in the arts community who was like, "I think Black culture gets lost because we have not trained enough of our community to sit on boards of directors and take that work seriously." She was saying that in the past, that type of work or these smaller organizations would kind of fizzle out because there wasn't a strong-enough understanding and application of the fiduciary or the organizational duties. Or the challenge was that infighting would end these organizations. We would have this really beautiful thing, and all of a sudden, it's over because folks didn't get along. I'm really proud that we are an organization that is looking to do that work internally, to say, "Hey. Conflict is normal." Let's normalize having healthy conflict as part of our organization because then we can get to the heart of the matter a lot faster and do the work that we need to serve the community here. We can do that better if we're not beefing.

**AF:** One hundred percent. I think that's a really good point and something that people don't think about at all when trying to create these kinds of collectives. Trust me—as someone who studies 1960s activists, I've seen it fall apart very quickly and very pettily.

**Stacie Williams:** But even just to think, well, okay, here is where we are at this point in history, and if we're doing a great job right now working together and helping people preserve their history, then shouldn't it be our responsibility as a collective to make sure that we are a healthy collective? Communicating with each other well and working together well.

**AF:** On that note, what exciting things do you think are in store for the collective, or where do you want to see the Blackivists go in the future?

**Steven Booth:** I'm not sure of where I want to see the collective go in the future. But I am sure that what makes us so dynamic is our different skill sets and expertise. It's been really great to see us individually flourish in other areas that we don't necessarily get to do in our nine-to-five. What I'm looking forward to seeing is how we continue to develop as professionals and where that takes us in our careers.

**Stacie Williams:** I'm just really excited that with some of the different types of projects, it allowed us as a collective to stretch in ways that are good as individual professional development but also really good for

information sharing across a wide variety of disciplines. Because at this point, it is more than community members coming to us or people who have a specific interest in Black history. We've had universities and other institutions come to us and say, "Hey, can you help us think through these issues that we are having around description or metadata?" Or "Could you help us think through possibly curating an exhibit or looking at a curriculum and helping us update it?" So, it's exciting to be able to put these skills to use in these very different ways and with these very different people.

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**Ashley D. Farmer**

## Preserving Chicago Black History and Sound: The Blackivists and Honey Pot Performance

This case study documents and assesses the collaboration between the Chicago-based Blackivists and Honey Pot Performance, the creation of the performance Juke Cry Hand Clap, and the corresponding digital Chicago Black Social Culture Map. The Blackivists are a collective of Black archivists who prioritize Black cultural heritage, preservation, and memory work with the goal of using their professional expertise in service of preserving historically underdocumented communities. Honey Pot Performance is composed of six members for whom house music was formative and who have been performing together for the past two decades. Members recently formalized their collective into a nonprofit with the express goal of focusing on sustainability and deeper impact in their communities. As an incorporated group, Honey Pot members have maintained their interest in performance while also turning their attention to critical engagement with the humanities. Their goal is to create tangible ways of sharing postperformance work by developing programming, books, and archives that document Chicago's Black cultural history and community.

In 2018, the two collectives began a joint venture to document house music and culture in Chicago and to create ongoing digital mapping and preservation systems. The project, several years long, had multiple components, which included a series of Honey Pot-created and Honey Pot-sponsored events across Chicago, paired with Blackivists-assisted preservation of these performances, community archives, and community education.

1 Jesse Saunders, *House Music: The Real Story* (Baltimore, 2007), 15.



Figure 1. This image is one of the Honey Pot Performance's Mapping Sessions events that took place at Mana Contemporary, Chicago, IL in March 2014. The color coded Chicago neighborhood maps on the wall include handwritten information on post-it notes created by attendees who shared Chicago House venues and experiences per location. (Photo credit: Honey Pot Performances)

## Background, Ethics, and Goals

“Like a phoenix rising from the ashes of the infamous Disco Demolition night at Comiskey Park,” house music traces its origins to the underground clubs of Chicago and New York in the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Disco was falling out of fashion with everyday club goers in part because of the mainstream co-optation of the form and because of the rise in antidisco sentiment and protests like the Disco Demolition. On July 12, 1979, DJ Steve Dahl encouraged a crowd of mostly white, intoxicated White Sox fans at Chicago’s Comiskey Park to storm the field and burn thousands of R&B, disco, and soul records.<sup>2</sup> For many Black and Latinx Chicagoans, for whom disco was still an important cultural sound and offered community, events like the demolition were “clarion call[s] indicting their culture” and a sign of the changing times in the Windy City’s music scene.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, DJs were experimenting with mixing disco and other sounds that would eventually morph into what is now known as house

2 Micah E. Salkind, *Do You Remember House? Chicago's Queer of Color Undergrounds* (New York, 2019), 25.

3 Salkind, *Do You Remember House?*, 29.



music. The origins of the sound and name are nebulous, but the connections to Chicago are clear. In the 1970s, local dancers, DJs, and disco fans journeyed to 206 South Jefferson Street and made their way down the stairs to the small room, the Warehouse, and “pitch black” dance floor, “illuminated only by the intermittent pulse of a strobe light,” to hear DJs like Frankie Knuckles on the weekends.<sup>4</sup> Several years later, another club, the Music Box, developed and became equally critical to the origins of the house sound. So influential were these Chicago clubs that one origin story is that the music emanating from them became known as “house music.” Others argue that it was a genre of music that incorporated the “sounds of long-standing Black, gay house party cultures in Chicago” well before the Warehouse and the Music Box became popular.<sup>5</sup> As the pioneers of house sound and culture, Chicago’s Black and Brown queer communities understood the music’s importance and its connection to larger traditions of soul, funk, jazz, R&B, and blues. They fought to maintain these connections as well as the underground counterculture spaces, gardens, and clubs where it developed within the city.

But just like disco, house would go mainstream. It started with teens from Chicago’s South Side sneaking into the Warehouse and Music Box and bringing the music from the underground clubs to “parochial school dance scenes.” It wasn’t long before the music hit city and nationwide radio stations and, eventually, global marketplaces.<sup>6</sup> Gone was the sonic sentimentality of live DJ performances, the original underground club scene, and the queerness and complexity of the community. Here to stay was a broader appreciation for house music’s alternative metric structure and seamless musicality, streamed through the newest technological convention: the cassette tape. By the mid-1980s, house had become so commercial and global that it was popular in Europe, again propelled by Black DJs and underground studios before white British pop artists relied on it to penetrate the music charts.<sup>7</sup>

The question for a group like Honey Pot, then, was how to preserve this history rooted in Chicago’s minority communities through performance and digital humanities. Undergirding this project were ethical questions such as how members could mitigate power hierarchies in archival collection and cultivate mutually beneficial partnerships with the local house community. Members adopted an approach rooted in Black feminist theory for performing and producing this archive. Their method included viewing performance as a way to share collective information, working with the assumption that all members of the community—dancers, DJs, club owners, and so forth—are knowledge producers and that knowledge of a subject comes from the production of many different kinds of “texts,” ranging from performance, to flyers, to music, to narratives.

This approach to archival acquisition and preservation aligned with the mission and goals of the Blackivists.<sup>8</sup> Composed of university, city, and private collection archivists, the group aims to “[help] individuals

4 Salkind, *Do You Remember House?*, 47; Saunders, *House Music*, 36.

5 Salkind, *Do You Remember House?*, 48.

6 Salkind, *Do You Remember House?*, 86.

7 Dana C. Ayres, *The Historical Seeds and Worldwide Dissemination of House Music* (self-pub., 2014), 20–21.

8 “Love Can’t Turn Around: Evidences of the Belief in the Power of Our Collective Social Experiences as Sites of Pleasure, Purpose, and Politics” (“Archive Records 2020: Creating Our Future,” Society for American Archivists Conference, virtual, August 8, 2020).



Figure 2. This image is one of the Honey Pot Performance’s Mapping Sessions events that took place at Mana Contemporary, Chicago, IL in March 2014. This image includes event participants who are standing, sitting and discussing their experiences. The image also includes color coded Chicago neighborhood maps on the wall include handwritten information on post-it notes created by attendees who shared Chicago House venues and experiences per location. (Photo credit: Honey Pot Performance)

and organizations inventory, document, and preserve all aspects of humanity” and to “empower people to use the past to speculate on or create through direct action radical, liberatory and inclusive futures.” The collective values open access to historical materials, employment and amplification of best practices for preservation, the protection of “marginalized histories and artifacts,” and “education and transparent communication with the public about cultural heritage practices and theories.”<sup>9</sup> The goals and values of both groups made for an ideal partnership aimed at preserving the history of house music and the social and cultural landscapes of Chicago as well as educating broader publics on archiving and preservation.

### Narrative

Honey Pot performances typically take twelve to eighteen months to develop and are centered around a question or issue related to Black culture. For example, the group produced *Sweet Goddess*—a multimedia

<sup>9</sup> “Our Purpose,” Blackivists (website), accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.theblackivists.com/our-mission>.



Figure 3. The Chicago Black Social Culture Map Archiving Day event that took place at Links Hall, Chicago, IL on September 29, 2018. The Blackivists facilitated and managed community archiving stations. This image includes Raquel Flores-Clemons, Blackivists co-founder, wearing black and a black and tan head wrap seated at a table behind a laptop discussing preservation with a community member wearing a colorful floral pattern dress on the opposite side of the table. Others pictured here are Kelley Hines, museum registrar, who is wearing a blue multiprint dress and scanning materials and Erin Babbin, On the Real Film director, standing and positioning camera. (Photo credit: M Thrē Photography/Honey Pot Performance)

workshop exploring women’s experiences in Chicago house music and culture. Their 2014 performance *Juke Cry Hand Clap* was a turning point in the collective’s work and the origins of their collaboration with the Blackivists. An “extended exploration of Chicago house music & dance culture as a significant phenomenon of American contemporary culture,” this performance showcased the interconnectedness of house and other Black musical forms, with an emphasis on the connections between these forms and the Great Migration.<sup>10</sup> To develop this piece, Honey Pot members hosted six months of parties and gatherings to ask people to map where they or their family members went to hear and dance to house music. They then integrated this information into their performance.

10 “Love Can’t Turn Around.”





Figure 4. The Chicago Black Social Culture Map Archiving Day event that took place at Links Hall, Chicago, IL on September 29, 2018. This image includes a handwritten sign that reads “Station 2: Oral History Interviews.” Handwritten signs were placed throughout the venue and used to direct attendants to the proper station for specific information pertaining to donating information or obtaining services. (Photo credit: M Thrē Photography/Honey Pot Performance)

When Blackivists member Skylia Hearn saw *Juke Cry Hand Clap*, she was moved by how Honey Pot used education, history, and the arts to commemorate house culture and believed that such a production should be widely available. She also met Maida McNeal, artistic and managing director of Honey Pot Performance, who explained that the collective’s ultimate goal was to expand on this particular piece in order “to think about performance in connection with humanities work.”<sup>11</sup> Hearn invited her Blackivists colleagues Steven Booth, Tracy Drake, Raquel Flores-Clemons, Erin Glasco, and Stacie Williams to collaborate with Honey Pot to document the group’s performances and support their plans to extend this performance into a more extensive public-facing mapping project.

The two groups launched a collaboration to produce the Chicago Black Social Culture Map through a series of events across the city. The programming included events at Chicago’s famed DuSable Museum and Stony Island Arts Bank on the South Shore, among other sites. The goal was to capture and engage a wide cross section of the house music community. The Blackivists set up community archiving stations at each of the events held throughout the year to engage in a public archiving project in conjunction with the Honey Pot performances and panels. The stations included rooms set up to record oral histories, including a camera and interviewer trained in conducting oral history. The archivists

11 “Love Can’t Turn Around.”



Figure 5. The Chicago Black Social Culture Map Archiving Day event that took place at Links Hall, Chicago, IL on September 29, 2018. The Blackivists facilitated and managed community archiving stations. This image includes Stacie Williams, Blackivists co-founder, smiling wearing glasses and a Black Panther Party grey sweatshirt seated at a table behind a laptop discussing preservation strategies with Blackivists co-founder Steven Booth smiling wearing a denim jacket, cream top, and green pants standing and facing Stacie on the opposite side of the table. (Photo credit: M Thre Photography/Honey Pot Performance)

also set up digitizing stations, where attendees could have objects such as posters or flyers from their personal collections digitized.

Reticence and questions of trust hung over the archiving collaboration initially. At the first event in September 2018, attendees held on to the items in their personal archive until they were more certain about the Blackivists' presence, purpose, and collaboration with Honey Pot. Toward the end of the event, participants started to be more trusting with their personal artifacts and stories, and the archivists were able to digitize some artifacts. However, the archivists were not able to create strong workflows for documentation and preservation.

A year and multiple events later, the Blackivists had gained community trust, and they received hundreds of items to scan during events. When they had a steady influx of items, two archivists worked as digitization techs while the others performed quality control on the files, including creating naming conventions aimed at amplifying



**CHICAGO BLACK SOCIAL CULTURE MAP COMMUNITY ARCHIVING DAY & WEB LAUNCH**

**LINKS HALL** | 3111 N Western Ave, Chicago, IL 60618  
Saturday September 29, 2018 10 am - 4 pm

**History Keepers....Cultural Workers....Matriarchs/ Patriarchs....**

Help us build the Chicago Black Social Culture Map documenting clubs, cabarets, lounges, and other social spaces from the Great Migration through the early 21st century with a focus on the emergence of house culture in the 1970s and 1980s.

We all know folks, especially elders, who have a plethora of wonderfully amazing treasures in their possession. Or you, yourself, might be the person in possession of the Black Gold. Have you thought about preserving these objects for future generations?

These precious items contribute to the richness of our communities and society at large. These archives can help tell the story of your family, your community, and keep the people's history alive. Bring your flyers, posters, photos, tapes, fashion, and oral histories to our first community archiving day.

Learn about our online map featuring over 350 different venues important to Chicago's Black social culture histories from ballrooms, cabarets, taverns, lounges, and clubs to radio stations, recording industry, and teen spots. Enrich the map with your own personal archives and stories!

**HOW TO PARTICIPATE:**  
Take our quick pre-registration survey and tell us what kinds of objects you'll be bringing.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/H76X8WX>

**PHOTO BOOTH:**  
Bring your artifacts and fashion to model and/or take pictures

**PHOTOGRAPHS:**  
photos, albums

**EPHEMERA:**  
Posters, flyers, buttons, vintage clothes, and other unique items...

**AUDIOVISUAL A/V:**  
VHS, Super 8, Beta and DATs

Our community archiving experts will be on hand to discuss DIY (Do-It-Yourself) preservation methods. They will address questions and concerns to get you prepared or further assist you in your current preservation methods.

Collect your Black Gold and bring it to the Chicago Black Social Culture Map Community Archiving Day & Web Launch!

Figure 6. This is an image of the Chicago Black Social Culture Map Community Archiving Day and Web Launch flyer and information sheet that provides event logistics including registration information, information on how to contribute to the project and summarizes the services offered. (Credit: Honey Pot Performance)

the metadata for the objects. Collective members recorded date, the name of the donor, mapping data, and other details. Archivists saved all images on external hard drives and in the cloud and gave participants their images and files on thumb drives. After the last event, the Blackivists prepared a report for Honey Pot with a summary report and recommendations for replicating and scaling up this performance/preservation collaboration in the future.

Preservation, largely via scanning, was one aspect of the Blackivists' work; community education was another. At the core of the Blackivists' mission is sharing their archival and preservation expertise with community members. Members achieved this through one-on-one consultations with Chicago community members, including guiding them on how to preserve their own collections using cost-effective methods, such as keeping artifacts in acid-free containers, removing artifacts from sunlight and potential water-flow or flooding areas, and storing artifacts to protect them against other elements and natural disasters. Blackivists members also participated in panel discussions at Honey Pot events during which they offered basic information on documenting personal collections and discussed individual and communal preservation strategies. Through this work, they were able to share the formative role that house music played in their lives, build relationships and trust with Chicago's Black and LGBTQ community, and bridge gaps between community cultural spaces and preservation.

## Conclusion

The collaboration proved successful in connecting archival experts and community members as well as preserving Black house music culture—past and present—in Chicago. Both the Blackivists and Honey Pot Performance received positive feedback about the collaboration that helped create and sustain archives of Chicago house music.

By far the most extensive product to come out of this collaboration is the Chicago Black Social Culture Map, a public-facing digital humanities project designed “to preserve Chicago's black social cultural lineage” by offering information on social venues, historic events, narratives, video, and supplemental media all rooted in an interactive online map. The site documents the music and culture of Black Chicagoans from “the Great Migration to the rise of House music.” It is a dynamic and evolving project that relies on Honey Pot's cultural connections and community engagement as well as the Blackivists' archiving expertise.

As the project has grown, managers have had to change online platforms to bring the map “more in line with archiving standards” and are continuing to input information gathered over the last year and a half into the database for increased accessibility.<sup>12</sup> The next step is to develop collections around themes that have developed from this monument to house music. The Blackivists and Honey Pot are also working on developing public programming based on artifacts, stories, and geographies that emanate from the map.

## Discussion

House music has a unique history steeped in Chicago's Black and Latinx queer culture that has been overlooked and underdocumented—especially as the form popularized and globalized. Because of the long history of co-optation, lack of consideration for community standards and leaders, and questionable acquisition practices, marginalized communities are often distrustful of traditional institutions and their archival procurement methods.

The Blackivists' collaboration with Honey Pot offers one example of how to build trust among scholars, archivists, and community members; ensure that archival collections are publicly accessible; and build an ethical collection of archives with input from the community. Through this yearslong relationship with Honey Pot Performance, these archivists were able to enact their values of open access, protection of marginalized histories and artifacts, and education and transparent communication.

By offering new options and avenues for persevering and memorializing house culture—empowering community members to create their own archives, documenting performances, and developing interactive maps—this collaboration challenges long-held ideas about archiving and preservation mediums. It is also generative for thinking about how to reconceptualize community archiving partnerships, create dynamic and diverse monuments, and repair ruptured relationships among community members, historians, and archivists. In a moment in which debates about preserving and teaching Black history are at the fore, this collaboration offers a new opportunity to fundamentally rethink the archive and the preservation of Black artifacts.

12 “Love Can’t Turn Around.”

# A Call to Action from the Blackivists

A roadmap for historians, archivists, and memory workers to repair relationships and collect, process, and engage collections with an ethic of care.

Advocate for fully resourced archival work that prioritizes historically excluded narratives (people with disabilities, immigrants, Indigenous tribes, working class, Black, queer, etc.) and acknowledges the critical role of archives in shaping access to and our understanding of our shared history in this country and around the world.

### Introduction

As archivists who have both performed and supervised archival labor, we understand that there cannot be a full understanding or accounting of our collective history unless truly equitable resources are placed behind the work. That work includes but is not limited to acquisition, arrangement and description, cataloging, reference, digitization, digital asset management, outreach, exhibition, and administrative tasks. The resources needed to sustain this work include but are not limited to

- salaries that pay living wages with meaningful leave policies;
- administrative- or executive-level support for sustainable collection development; and
- readily accessible opportunities (time, cost, geographic location) for professional development and training, particularly in the areas of technology and metadata standards.

The latter are constantly evolving and require significant maintenance to ensure long-term preservation of and access to historical materials, as well as to retain staff with the specialized knowledge to continue advocating for policies and decisions that lead to more balanced collection development and personnel decisions.

If this work and the conditions around this work are not properly resourced, future historians, researchers, educators, students, and the public at large will have a much narrower swath of materials available to them for their own education and knowledge creation, ultimately robbing the world of a deeper contextual understanding of our past and how it impacts our present and collective futures.

The knowledge produced will reflect a narrowed scope of information available through archival discovery if archival work continues on a framework of precarity, low wages, and working conditions or policies that uphold and replicate existing social inequities. And what we continue to understand about ourselves and our history will be through a fractured, incomplete constellation of collections, decisions made



about collections, and ensuing archival silences that propose to represent our shared history.

## Repair

Recognizing that knowledge creation and curation are biased and that historical models of curation and acquisition within and adjacent to the archival profession have relied on oppressive frameworks such as racism, sexism, and capitalism, we call for a focus on repairing relationships among curators, collectors, historians, and communities and developing relationships with radical models of knowledge sharing or rights management with creators/collectors.

It should not be the case, for instance, that an archives-based research project about endangered Indigenous languages hosted on a university server should disappear on a whim of the university without considerable conversation with the tribes who contributed to the project (assuming those tribes were even offered the possibility to collaborate on the project with the hosting institution)—such as offering the groups an opportunity to migrate content to their own tribal-run servers or digital asset management systems.

Historians and researchers should also consider the same issue of relationship repair. There are far too many instances of researchers using archives without concern for the communities from which the materials came; the stewardship, safety, and vulnerability of the artifacts; or the extractive and sometimes exploitative practices through which the collections they use developed. This approach lends itself to a lack of concern about the funding needed to preserve such collections, about building relationships with the community and donors from which such materials developed, and about the overall stewardship and care of the materials after research is completed.

The issue of relationship repair also extends to gallery, archive, library, and museum workers. Far too often, students, historians, and researchers theorize “the archive” as part of their work and do not fully engage the donor or creator communities or the archives and library workers. There is a lack of acknowledgment of the labor of record keeping and collecting and that of processing and preserving records that can damage relationships among researchers, collection creators, and GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) workers.

If these relationships are not repaired, historians and writers run the risk of their work becoming disconnected from creator communities, of themselves losing their understanding of the labor needed to keep such archives up and running, and of damaging relationships by not engaging in the most pressing conversations about how to preserve and acknowledge collecting labor. We need more open and honest conversations about the labor and funding of archival collections and better relationships between collectors and researchers.

There are far too many instances of researchers using archives without concern for the communities from which the materials came; the stewardship, safety, and vulnerability of the artifacts; or the extractive and sometimes exploitative practices through which the collections they use developed.

### Ethic of Care

Given the biases and broken relationships embedded in the archival process, how, then, are we accountable to the communities we seek to document? How can we create models of costewardship or consortium partners that support shared creation of and access to archival materials that respect and value original ownership? How can we advocate across our institutions for policy that supports sustainable and inclusive collection development; meaningful—not whitewashed—inclusion, equity, and accessibility in staffing, including at key decision-making levels; and support and funding with time, money, or other resources, including ongoing professional development around technology and metadata description standards?

To support archive building with an ethic of care, we historians, archivists, and memory workers call for those in the archiving, historical, and collecting communities to

- acknowledge publicly the labor of archive workers in facilitating the discovery and research of collections, understanding that archive workers and historians have an interdependent, affective relationship;<sup>13</sup>
- advocate for full-time positions for archive workers that pay living wages and provide meaningful paid leave at universities, small community archives, and other nonprofit spaces;
- encourage collection development or research-based projects situated around historically excluded collections to seek to engage members of communities in meaningful ways throughout the life cycle of acquisition, description, and access; and
- seek collaborative external funding and publication models to encourage resource sharing across departments or institutions, increasing opportunities for unique archival discovery and engagement with the public.

13 Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives,” *Archivaria* 81 (Spring 2016): 23–43.



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**Steven D. Booth** is the archivist/project manager of the Johnson Publishing Company Archive for the Getty Research Institute and Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Throughout his career and professional service, he has worked to empower, serve, educate, and advocate for the communities he lives in and is part of through archival means. Steven holds a B.A. from Morehouse College and an M.S. in Library Science from Simmons College.



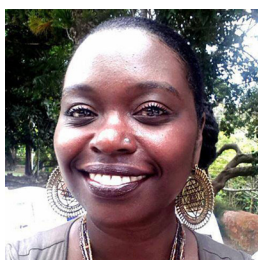
**Tracy Drake** is the Director of Special Collections and Archives at Reed College, focused on acquiring, preserving, and providing access to the historical and cultural records of the college. A graduate of Eastern Illinois University with a BS in African American Studies, an MA in history from Roosevelt University, and an MS in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her scholarship and research focus on anti-racism in society and information.



**Raquel Flores-Clemons** is the Head of the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection, a unit of the Archives and Special Collections division of Chicago Public Library and the largest African American history and literature collection in the Midwest. Raquel received her Master of Library and Information Science with Special Collections certification from the iSchool at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She also has studied at Howard University and received her Bachelors in Liberal Arts and Sciences from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



**Erin Glasco** is an independent archivist and researcher. Erin's interests include exploring how to meaningfully integrate radical empathy, rest, and anti-capitalism into their archival practice, and supporting the documentation of Black, queer, feminist informed grassroots movement work. They received their Master of Library and Information Science with a certificate in Special Collections from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



**Skyla S. Hearn** leads the Cook County Historic Archives and Records Office as the Manager of Archives, Offices Under the President. Through a social justice lens, she focuses on the intellectual and physical infrastructural development of accessible archives; and is most concerned with supporting communities to document, preserve and steward lesser known histories. Skyla holds a B.A. in Mass Communications and Media Arts, Black American Studies minor from SIUC, M.S. Library and Information Science, Special Collections certificate from UIUC, and is a University of Chicago Civic Leadership Academy, Center for Effective Government graduate.



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**Honey Pot Performance** is a Chicago-based creative collaborative chronicling Afro-feminist and Black diasporic subjectivities amidst the pressures of contemporary global life. Through critical performance, public humanities programming, and deep community engagement, we emphasize everyday ways of valuing the human.

**The Blackivists** are a collective of trained Black archivists who prioritize Black cultural heritage preservation and memory work. The Blackivists provide training, project management, best practices, and consultation on analog and digital archives upkeep. This includes recommendations for maintaining historical materials or how to work with institutions that want to acquire collections.