

Future of African American Archives

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Abstract: Over the last 40 years, there has been a sustained effort by the archival community to address diversity concerns in both the literature and the practice. We have achieved some measure of success but we still have yet to comprehensively examine individual ethnic communities' definitions of archives. Instead, we tend to aggregate ethnic issues into generalized, universal theories. To develop progressive and effective initiatives, we must move away from this large-scale, "assimilation" model and focus on developing cooperative and sustainable solutions.

To achieve authenticity and economic durability, these initiatives should be scaled down to address local needs, particularly in regards to partner-based digitization. Local collaboration is increasingly important due to reduced funding available to cultural heritage institutions and the uncertainty of post-grant sustainability. Additionally, smaller and more localized digitization projects share a core group of stakeholders and ensure that the selected diversity collections are accurately representative and meaningful to invested communities.

Assessment should inform the process. This poster will introduce an adaptable, interview-based assessment model that can crosswalk the archival needs, long-term goals, and collaborative potential of four institution types that offer unique African American collections: academic libraries, HBCUs, regional historical societies, and cultural heritage institutions. This research could inform our diversity strategies by not only identifying key areas of focus but also emphasizing the importance of approaching collaborative digitization less as a means to an end and more as a way to build long-term, symbiotic relationships that can support diversity agendas on a manageable and sustainable scale.

About the author:

Rabia Gibbs is currently a Research Assistant Professor and Diversity Librarian Resident at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK). She received her MLIS from the University of Pittsburgh in August 2009. She also holds a BA in Philosophy from The Evergreen State College and an M.Ed from Arcadia University in Elementary Education. She holds professional memberships in both the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists and is a member of the Archivists and Archives of Color Roundtable. Her research interests include diversity in archives and collaborative digital projects that focus on underrepresented collections.