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Collective actions: A response to the Whitney Museum of American Art and a case for Black archival and aesthetic practices as movement building

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ABSTRACT
Amid the 2020-2021 Black Lives Matter protests, the Whitney Museum in New York faced significant backlash for its handling of a controversial exhibition that many viewed as exclusionary and insensitive (MTIL Collective, 2018). This paper challenges the reader to view the Whitney Museum through an archival framing. Through four contemporary case studies, a proposition for more inclusive and equitable practices for the acquisition, archiving, and exhibition of art and material culture by minoritized people is centered, concluding with the value of Black archivists and curatorial staff in shaping discourse responsive to the contemporary moment and towards archival justice. The conversation concludes with practical examples for art educators and ways forward.

KEYWORDS: archive, public pedagogy, social movements, art museum, curatorial practice, archival justice, embodied archive

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A surprise email turned up in the inboxes of artists Joshua Kissi, Micaiah Carter, Andre Wagner, Florian Koenigsberger, Anthony Coleman, and Dani Kwateng. It was early Fall 2020, squarely in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown. In the email was an offer of lifetime admission to The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City (hereafter known as The Whitney or Whitney Museum) for themselves and a guest, with one small pretense— their work, previously purchased at a steep discount from their philanthropic website sale, would be on display in an upcoming exhibit titled "Collective Actions: Artist Interventions In a Time of Change."

Joshua, Michaiah, Andre, Florian, Anthony, and Dani are part of a momentary collective of Black photographers called See in Black. Joining

in creative work to invest in Black artists, they provide educational opportunities and community building with a focus on increasing "Black visibility" (See in Black, 2024). The over half a million dollars in funds they raised that summer through the sales of their prints were earmarked to support restorative justice causes. The artists were incensed and proceeded to their social media page to collectively highlight the museum's predatory behavior. Whitney's purchase was not only insensitive to the cause of the artists but also representative of an unusual or unconventional acquisition practice outside the framework of similarly sized art museums. Just five months after the start of the COVID-19 quarantine and the murder of Breonna Taylor, and a mere two months since the murder of George Floyd, moments that pushed the momentum of their work forward, See in Black found their names, likenesses, and art used in what felt to them like a performative gesture by The Whitney Museum (Webster, 2021).

The Fall of 2020 witnessed a contentious episode at The Whitney Museum. The planned exhibition, curated by archivist-researcher Farris Wahbeh, aimed to showcase protest ephemera from the nationwide Black Lives Matter marches that erupted that summer. The backlash to The Whitney's actions was swift, with many critics and activists calling out the museum's attempt to capitalize on the racial unrest and activism around the Black Lives Matter movement. The show was immediately criticized and ultimately canceled (Ulaby, 2020). This controversy served as a catalyst, bringing to a head long-standing concerns about exploitative acquisition practices and the rampant exclusion of Black and Brown voices within major art institutions. The Whitney's acquisition and exhibition of See in Black's work, without their consent or input, reflects a larger pattern of exploitative and exclusionary practices by museums. While museums have long relied on extracting cultural capital from the labor of BIPOC artists, The Whitney's handling of this exhibit laid bare its inability to center the "care and attention placed on the social history of the artist" necessary for a nuanced and equitable acquisition and interpretation of their work (Sidogi, 2023, p. 75).

As history has shown, visual documentation serves as a powerful teaching tool, offering a deeper understanding of the issues and emotions that fueled activism (Sirmans & Colón, 2020). The inclusion of protest ephemera in large museums has become a contested space. While these collections offer valuable historical documentation of social movements and public dissent, their acquisition standards and exhibition raise critical questions (Sirmans & Colón, 2020). Concerns often center on the potential exploitation of the people who created the ephemera. Additionally, questions arise about the authenticity of representation as predominantly White curatorial teams navigating sensitive racial and social justice issues can create a disconnect between

the presented narrative and the lived experiences documented in the ephemera (Collier & Sutherland, 2020).

This paper seeks to challenge the reader to view The Whitney Museum through an archival framing, positioning the museum's controversial practices during the 2020-2021 Black Lives Matter protests as symptomatic of broader systemic issues in cultural institutions. Drawing on four case studies—The Black Bottom Digital Archive, We the Diaspora, #ArchivesforBlackLives and Maya Stovall's Liquor Store Theatre—the paper argues for a model of archival justice as articulated by Caswell (2021) that is rooted in Black-led artistic and curatorial interventions often occurring outside traditional institutions embodying innovative forms of public pedagogy. This article theorizes how aesthetic and archival strategies contribute to movement building and civic education, beginning by analyzing The Whitney Museum controversy as a paradigmatic case of institutional extractivism. Each case study then helps to demonstrate how Black artists and scholars reclaim the archive as a site of memory and its potential for k-16 learning environments.

Black Responses and Archival Justice

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) distinguishes between "archives" (in lowercase) as physical records and storage spaces, and "Archives" (in uppercase) as institutions responsible for acquiring, maintaining, and providing access to those records (SAA, 2016). Art institutions such as The Whitney fall into the latter category—collecting Archives whose acquisition policies and curatorial decisions shape public understanding and historical memory as they determine what records and materials to acquire, preserve, and exhibit. Some large art institutions, like the Smithsonian, are archival-forward, where they are transparent in their existence as an archive. Essentially, the work of the archive and the archivist, as well as those who might curate the experience for the broader public, is to assess, collect, organize, preserve, and provide access under the auspices of agreed-upon standards (Society of American Archivists, 2016). Community archivists, those often without institutional archival training or not operating in traditional archival spaces, have become a boon to the field yet still struggle with what the archivist title means— "The reason we called ourselves *Black Bottom* Archives before we were doing any explicit historical or 'traditional' archiving was that we saw ourselves as actively creating this archive. We understood what we were doing as creating an archive…" (Prosper, 2022, p. 75). Maya Cade of the *Black Film Archive* notes, "The act of collecting, sorting, preserving and making available is an act of love for a group. It's an act of care" (Kaur, 2022, para. 14), highlighting the responsibility and intentionality required when representing people's histories and the open call to communities to engage in archival work.

Archives serve a pedagogical purpose, and their archival material serves as "open educational resources" (Vergara, 2021, para. 6). In both the processing and exhibition phases of archival work, interpretation and public value are assigned to records through metadata, exhibit labeling, and physical placement within the collection (such as organizational labeling and tagging) and within a public display alongside other themed pieces. Art institutions are the most expressive of this work and thus hold significant power over the public's understanding and interpretation of art. With this understanding, The Whitney Museum's acquisition of See in Black's art and collection of protest ephemera would have fallen under its documented acquisition policies, and it would hold greater responsibility as it communicates an educational value to the public. As Vergara (2021) points out, archival institutions serve as primary sites where archives are also put on display for meaning-making, but may fall victim to the power dynamics often felt by their visitors:

> Instead of thinking of the archive as a sacred repository, I propose instead thinking of activist archiving as energeia, action, a practice that scholars can perform in educational settings for social justice purposes. (para. 8)

In response to the long history of exclusion in institutions like The Whitney, a surge of independent archival projects arose in the mid-2010s, spearheaded by Black creatives and historians. These Black archivists, artists, and scholars have begun to articulate and practice what is increasingly referred to as archival justice—a praxis committed to correcting historical omissions, redressing representational harms, and empowering communities to curate and interpret their own narratives.

Archival justice, as articulated by Caswell (2021), refers to an active and intentional practice that addresses systemic inequities in historical representation. There has been a shift in the profession's understanding of the archive and power, acknowledging the multiple points at which bias and thus harm can enter the process (Robinson-Sweet, 2018). The "power" of the archive, as Robinson-Sweet (2018) intuitively notes, is "its ability to oppose the state's chronophagy and the clearing of its debts for past wrongs" (p. 26), acknowledging the ways the state schemes to control these narratives. Countering, as many justice-oriented praxes require, the erasure and distortion of marginalized communities' experiences foregrounds the intentionality and accountability in the preservation and dissemination of cultural memory. Hartman (2008) emphasizes the archive's capacity to restore agency and voice through tools like critical fabulation, an imaginative reconstruction that "troubles the line" between history, our methods of interpretation,

and the necessity of filling in the silences of the archive. PG Watkins, co-founder of the Black Bottom Digital Archive, articulates in their meditation on Black archives that the vernacular materials and memories in these holding spaces offer an opportunity to add complexity to established narratives (Prosper, 2022). These practices affirm the radical potential of community-led archiving grounded in the everyday.

The surge of these non-traditional archives represents a critical act of interpolation—the insertion of distinct, Black community-based projects into an overwhelmingly White archival landscape. It stresses the power dynamics at play, but crucially, this movement reframes archival work as a form of public pedagogy, or pedagogy occurring in nontraditional sites, as this social movement inspires necessary educational endeavors outside of traditional classrooms (hooks, 2003; Sandlin et al., 2011). Archivist Dorothy Berry (2021) notes that the conceptual model of the archive has become synonymous with expressions of history and memory, which seems to be at odds with the standardization provided by a long archival tradition and representative association (the SAA). The definition has become slippery for those who practice citing how the expansiveness of the archive as a concept is troubling, while others who appreciate the amorphous boundaries of the methodology call for a new criticality, education, and way to make the archive public.

The 2020 Whitney Museum Controversy

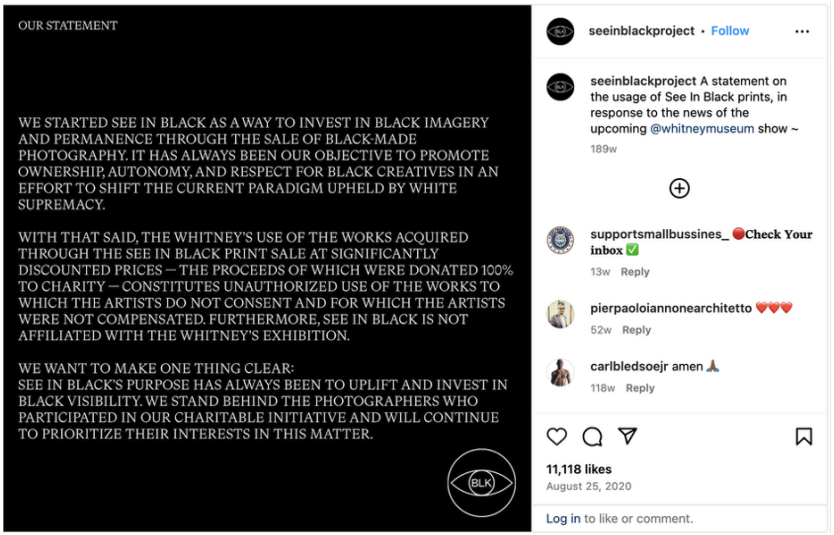
Conspicuously undated, The Whitney Museum of Art's named director, Adam D. Weinberg, responded to the collective anger following the senseless and inhumane murder of George Floyd with a statement, as did many other predominantly White-owned and operating companies and institutions. Weinberg's edited copy includes the museum's understanding that they "have made mistakes," highlighting how racism and inequity are "devastating" and how their work in the arts "make[s] visible and condemn[s]" this injustice. Ultimately, they pledged to "re-examine our exhibitions and programs to ensure they continue to address the art and experiences of people of color, especially Black communities" (Whitney Museum of Art, n.d.).

In a search for a direct response from The Whitney on the Black Lives Matter exhibit debacle, there is little official documentation. Their brief, undated response might be a tactic to address any cultural or racial issues the museum could face, both past and future. In doing so, there seems to be a demonstrated "affected ignorance" (Moody-Adams, 2022) or inability to fully acknowledge the profound and implacable nature of its power over the "Black communities across the country" they seek to "stand with" (Whitney Museum of Art, n.d.). In their response, The Whitney Museum of Art effectively deflects accountability.

It denies the specificity of this crisis rather than exhibiting a sincere engagement with the critiques and concerns that the activists and communities they seek to represent have voiced.

Newspaper outlet The Guardian, in their article titled "'I felt taken advantage of': the story of another Whitney Museum controversy," highlighted a pattern of missteps by the institution in recent years (Sayej, 2020). This article specifically referenced the 2017 Whitney Biennial, where White artist Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till's mangled body sparked outrage for its appropriation and potentially exploitative nature (Sayej, 2020). This prior controversy foreshadowed the concerns surrounding the Black Lives Matter ephemera exhibition, once again raising questions about The Whitney's sensitivity to issues of race and representation within its curatorial practices. Arts news source Hyperallergic recorded the demographics of the opening exhibit in The Whitney's new 2015 expansion into downtown. In it, Hrag Vartanian, the author and co-founder of Hyperallergic, critiques the lack of diversity in the artists featured in The Whitney Museum's inaugural exhibition at its new location (Vartanian, 2015). Vartanian's analysis demonstrates the included artists' skew towards White and male artists, with a much lower representation of Latinx and Native American voices. In this analysis, he compares these numbers against the US population, noting which categories do and do not represent the larger population.

Figure 1
Instagram post by @SeeinBlackproject on August 25, 2020.



Using social media as a sounding board, artists, activists, and scholars criticized the exhibition. See in Black posted a response to The Whitney on their Instagram (See Figure 1), providing a clear counter to The Whitney's predatory practices. This social media exposure quickly gained traction, drawing widespread criticism as news outlets picked up the story, fueling the larger conversation about The Whitney's lack of sensitivity and community engagement.

Critics argued that The Whitney aimed to acquire protest materials at a significant discount from the artists who created them. This raised concerns about the museum profiting from the Black Lives Matter movement without fairly compensating the artists whose work documented it (Ulaby, 2020). The timing of the exhibition, just months after the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, sparked further criticism that The Whitney was insensitive to the ongoing struggle for racial justice. The Whitney's top-down approach, where a predominantly White curatorial team acquired and showcased protest ephemera without the consent or input of the Black artists and activists who created the works, created additional concern. Critics further questioned whether the museum, with its predominantly White curatorial staff, could authentically represent the experiences documented in the ephemera (Collier & Sutherland, 2020). Lastly, the planned exhibition involved the unilateral acquisition of materials by The Whitney through unconventional means, with no apparent collaboration with Black artists or activists involved in the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Digital Archive's Innovation

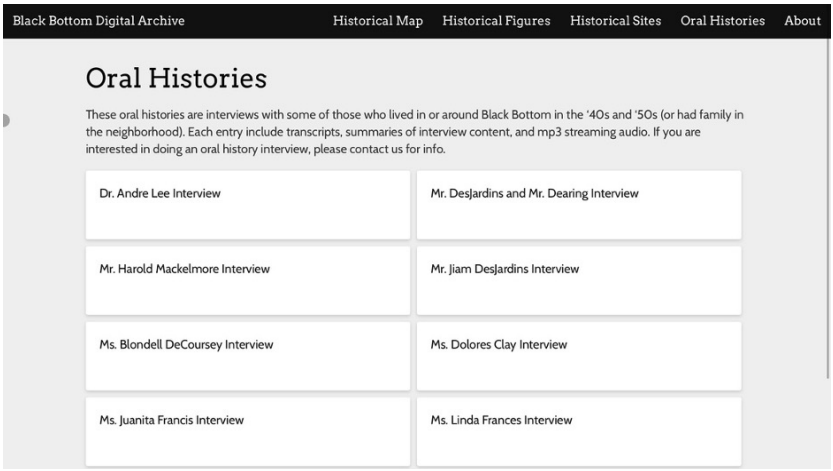
It should be noted The Whitney is not alone in its questionable behavior as we look through the lineage of these poor archiving and exhibition practices. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1969 "'Harlem on My Mind:' The Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968" exhibition notoriously excluded Black artists and creatives in the planning process and show– an exhibit meant to highlight the creative and cultural prowess of the zeitgeist they wished to portray. This lack of community engagement is a missed opportunity and further alienates the very community these exhibitions aim to represent; thus, the archival interventions discussed in this paper—both digital and embodied—function as examples of pedagogical acts and tools to enact in opposition to the norms set by large, established institutions like The Whitney Museum. The following case studies exemplify archival justice as a response to institutional extraction, showcasing four distinct yet complementary approaches to community-centered archival work and public pedagogy. By focusing on non-physical archives, these examples show how digital innovations move archives beyond storage in favor of community engagement and shaping public understanding of history.

Black Bottom Digital Archive

The *Black Bottom Digital Archive* is an example of public pedagogy through art. Dedicated to chronicling the history of Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood– a historic Black neighborhood demolished in the 1960s for a freeway project– the archive uses photographs, maps, oral histories, and other user-generated content to reconstruct and preserve the collective memory of a vibrant community displaced by urban renewal (Black Bottom Digital Archive, n.d.). The project's ethos of "putting the community in charge of its own history" reflects the counter-archivist stance of dismantling traditional power structures. Through this framework, the *Black Bottom Digital Archive* can reclaim a sense of power to chronicle and interpret history from within the community itself—Austin's (2022) "narratives of interiority" (p. 63). Moreover, its interactive digital format transforms the archive into a pedagogical tool. Rather than serving as a static repository, it invites users to engage critically with historical material, contextualize it through their lived experiences, and contribute to a living archive.

By inviting writers, videographers, educators, and documentarians to participate, the project reifies its motto—"bringing the past to the present and future." In doing so, it not only preserves memory but mobilizes it as a tool for critical engagement and activism, particularly around contemporary issues of gentrification and spatial justice.

Figure 2
Screenshot of the "Oral Histories" webpage on the *Black Bottom Digital Archive* website, showing a list of interviews with those who lived in Black Bottom during the 1940s and 1950s.



"We the Diaspora"

We the Diaspora, a virtual archive and exhibition curated by communications strategist Jiya Pinder, further illustrates the pedagogical and activist potential of digital archiving. This borderless digital project documents the global Black experience through visual, textual, and multimedia materials. Traversing geographies and temporalities, Pinder curates content that connects historical Black liberation struggles with present-day activism through art, photography, and video. *We the Diaspora*, uniquely reconfigures the digital archive as a site of political education and collective empowerment outside of established interpreting institutions.

Crucially, as a form of digital public pedagogy, this project exists within a context that offers immediate feedback and engagement as comments and direct messages provide direct access to consumers. Pinder's emphasis on co-creation and community engagement redefines the role of the curator, transforming it from a top-down, exclusive practice to one of facilitation and dialogue. Pinder sources her posts and stories from the community she has built on social media, through collaborations with like-minded social brands, and via calls for submissions to "share [their] creative legacy" (See Figure 4). Here, Pinder inadvertently redefines the role of the archivist—not as an authoritative gatekeeper but as a facilitator of narrative agency and a site for further pedagogical development. Pinder and her work were featured in a CNN piece titled "How Black archives are highlighting overlooked parts of history and culture" (Kaur, 2022). This media coverage further highlights the rising prominence of Black-led digital archives as vital public pedagogical tools, but also the value of the working model they have created to empower rather than extract from the very people and communities they hope to serve.

Figure 3

Snapshot of content on the *@wethediaspora* Instagram page

Figure 4

@wethediaspora Instagram post from May 19, 2025, depicting a flyer for an open call for submissions in collaboration with podcasting and "storytelling" page *@allblackcreatives.*

#ArchivesforBlackLives

The *#ArchivesForBlackLives* collective exemplifies the public pedagogy model of the outside-the-norm teaching and learning sites while also demonstrating the potential of a diverse group of professionals. Composed of archivists, scholars, and activists, the initiative works to rectify systemic erasures by promoting the preservation of Black experiences. The collective's pedagogy is explicitly political, teaching communities how to take ownership of their narratives, build sustainable archival infrastructures, and advocate for representational justice within and beyond institutional contexts (Archives for Black Lives, n.d.). Through its workshops, online toolkits, and public outreach, *#ArchivesForBlackLives* epitomizes public pedagogy in action—facilitating informal, community-based learning about documentation, preservation, and historical recovery. The initiative does not simply critique traditional archives or denude them of their relevance—it builds alternatives by providing services to community archives as they collect, standardize, make public, and apply for financial support.

#ArchivesForBlackLives aligns perfectly with the core tenets of pub-

lic pedagogy, which emphasizes dismantling power imbalances and encouraging critical engagement with knowledge (Sandlin, 2011). By supporting the work of community archives and encouraging the public to engage directly with these histories, *#ArchivesForBlackLives* can challenge the dominant archival and exhibition practices by proliferating inclusive practices. In stark contrast to The Whitney's top-down approach, this grassroots initiative rejects the notion of the museum or archive as the sole arbiter of cultural memory, allowing space for diverse perspectives and self-determination.

Liquor Store Theatre

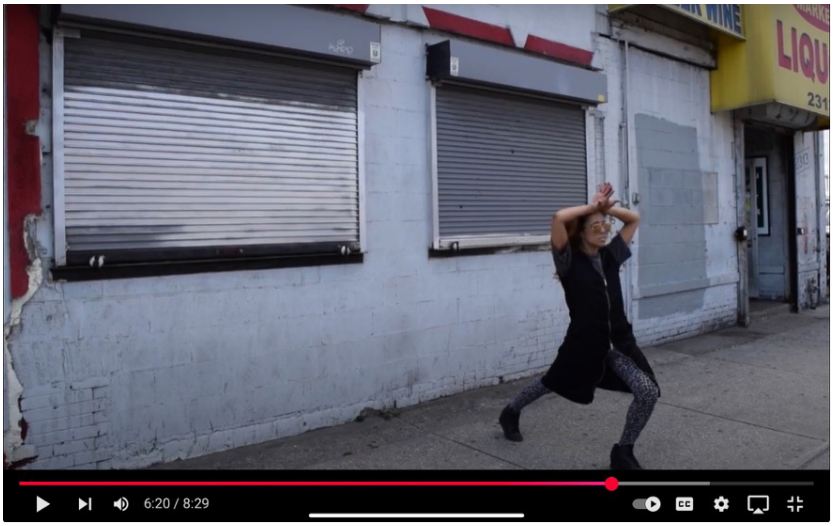
Black art and activism is a partnership as old as the social, political, and ultimately human struggles of Black people in America. A powerful example of its manifestation is performance artist Maya Stovall's multi-year project "Liquor Store Theatre," in which she offers a compelling example of embodied archival practice and site-specific public pedagogy. Situated in her Detroit neighborhood, Stovall danced in the parking lots and sidewalks of liquor stores, using these spaces as a platform to connect with her neighbors (see Figure 4). In her book of the same name, Stovall explains how liquor stores become vital community centers in underserved neighborhoods. Unlike the green parks found in wealthier areas, liquor stores often become a central meeting place—a "plaza" for local residents. Rather than operating within conventional gallery or museum spaces, Stovall intentionally located her work in sites that serve as informal social hubs in disinvested Black neighborhoods. Her choreographic interventions and conversations with passersby record oral histories that blur boundaries between performance, ethnography, and archival documentation. Here, we are attuned to the realities of a city struggling to recover from repeated recessions, shifting economies, and historic inequities, yet brimming with love and connection.

Stovall's interventionist work, informed by both her artistic practice and the sociopolitical constructs of her neighborhood (Desai, 2020), physically embodies the concept of the "archive" existing beyond traditional repositories. By understanding history as both "registered" through documents and "lived" through experience (Stovall, 2020, p. 3), we can see Stovall's performances challenging the limitations of conventional archives through active embodiment, reinforcing Stryker's (2010) concept of the "embodied archival imaginary" as a practice that expands historical accountability beyond social and physical boundaries (p. 107). These archives often prioritize official records and dominant narratives, neglecting the experiences of marginalized communities (McDermid, 2014). As Stryker (2010) theorizes, embodied archival practices allow for alternative modes of holding and transmitting history through gesture, dialogue, and presence. Moreover, Stovall's

work exemplifies what Desai (2020) and hooks (2003) describe as radical pedagogy—a critically important practice that emerges from and responds to the sociopolitical conditions of marginalized communities. Through movement and interaction with the liquor store and its patrons and passersby as a site, the "ambiguous space" of the past (Stovall, 2020, p. 3) serves as a starting point for reimagining the role of archives and how the public can utilize them to engage with communities and document their living histories. By reconceptualizing the archive as something one can dance or speak, how can we view organizing and movement building as activities and practices that extend beyond strategy and logistics to center elements of aesthetics (Desai, 2020)?

The case studies demonstrate digital and embodied communal practices at work, countering and disrupting dominant narratives and the institutions that would see the continued dismissal of marginalized stories. Viewed collectively, they cultivate a critical consciousness that can prompt major archiving institutions like The Whitney to reconsider their practices.

Figure 5



Screenshot from *Liquor Store Theatre,* vol. 4, no. 4 (2017) on YouTube

Table 1
Characteristics of Black Archival and Aesthetic Practices across Case Studies

Case Study	Type	Key Practices	Movement/Knowledge Building Contributions
#ArchivesForBlackLives	Grassroots collective	Develops toolkits, workshops, and partnerships to support Black archival projects	Democratizes archival practices; supports local memory work; challenges institutional gatekeeping
Black Bottom Digital Archive	Community archive	Collects and shares oral histories from Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood	Preserves and makes public community history; educates about displacement
We the Diaspora	Instagram page/archive	Publicly sources and curates digital stories and resources about and for the Black diaspora	Provides political education; creates connections to lost or understoried histories; promotes a transnational solidarity
Liquor Store Theatre	Art intervention	Stages performances at Detroit liquor stores to explore space, memory, and history	Critiques urban revitalization; amplifies community voices

The Power of Storytelling and Reclaiming Narratives

Archives are not static collections but dynamic creations. Archives are produced, curated, assembled, and studied. They are experienced, and the pedagogical work takes place within the moving spaces where we engage in these experiences with others (Schuermans et al., 2012). Critically rethinking how archives are assembled, curated, and accessed, with the understanding that the archive is continuously being produced, ensures a more complete historical record (Ramirez, 2015). As Black artists become archivists, they redefine the role and function of the archive by breathing life into it through artistic production. Simply

put, their art is the making of the archive and the work it holds.
Black archives function beyond simply housing historical documents (Austin, 2022). They serve as spaces for healing, organizing resistance, and bolstering a sense of community and collective memory for Black individuals and groups (Rodney, 2020). The Combahee River Collective (1982) understood this sentiment as they wrote in their "Statement" that a "political realization" could come from the personal experiences of Black lives and even moreso from the unique challenges they face in society; they themselves a group of Black lesbian women. Public pedagogy, as Biesta (2011) interprets this relationship, "connects the educational and political and locates both firmly in the public domain" (p. 684). With this example and further framing by Cook's (2011) historical examination of the "shaping of the archival mindset" (p. 173), the oft-silenced counter-narratives that center on the viewpoints of historically minoritized individuals have the potential to expand both the archive and public knowledge. In other words, a truly public pedagogy that ensures the preservation and production of more-than-single narratives is always in service to the intersections of experiences, identities, and the ways in which politics can never be separated from them.

Ways Forward

In their work, "We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are," archivist Terry Cook documents the historic roles of archivists as curator, historian, and expert, and as White bodies have predominantly taken up these roles, they have perpetuated the values and priorities of the dominant group (Cook, 2011). The underrepresentation of Black professionals in archives and museums is a significant issue that contributes to the concerns surrounding The Whitney Museum's Black Lives Matter ephemera controversy. A 2006 report by the Society of American Archivists revealed that only 3% of archivists in the US identified as Black (Society of American Archivists, 2006). This lack of diversity has a direct impact on the perspectives preserved in traditional archives, which often prioritize White narratives and experiences. Furthermore, Collier and Sutherland (2020) point to Black artists and curators' continued challenges with representation, fueling a disconnect between the stories these institutions tell and the lived experiences of Black communities. This lack of diversity within the archival and museum professions hinders efforts toward inclusive representation. It manifests a sense of exclusion for Black artists and communities when they engage with these institutions.

In early 2021, *The Black Scholar* released a call for proposals on Black archival practice. The guest editors outlined a series of thematic engagements that point to the "imagination extinction" in the physical archive, the archivist, and their practice. What, then, they ask, are the "potential

and promise[s]" of an orientation toward a distinct Black archival practice (Collier & Sutherland, 2022)? The archive, in their words, is both lived and remembered—existing in a dual present and past. This issue of the journal presents an "offer[ance]" to the "untamed" practices existing at the edges of contemporary archives (Collier & Sutherland, 2022), as presented by scholars working in these spaces.

These digital narratives promote historical literacy and spark critical conversations about race and social justice (Sweeny, 2017). Artistic and educational practices empower Black communities to reclaim their narratives and educate the broader public about their experiences. This stands in stark contrast to The Whitney's archival approach with See in Black, which aimed to exploit Black creativity without fostering dialogue or community engagement. Projects such as the *Black Bottom Digital Archive, We the Diaspora, #ArchivesForBlackLives*, and Liquor Store Theatre exemplify what archival justice looks like in practice. These interventions remind us that archives are not neutral repositories but socially constructed spaces with the power to shape collective memory and historical possibility.

Table 2
Practical Applications for K–16 Art Educators Inspired by Black Archival Case Studies

Case Study	Examples of Educational Application	Arts-Based Pedagogical Goals
#ArchivesForBlackLives	Use archival justice toolkits to guide student-led archive projects	Developing research skills; building community awareness and ethical stewardship
Black Bottom Digital Archive	Create classroom oral history projects; explore displacement through neighborhood mapping	Engaging with local history; critiquing urban development; understanding governmental processes and policies (historic and contemporary)
We the Diaspora	Identity and heritage-based digital storytelling projects using the format (rather than the application) of Instagram, TikTok, or other social media apps.	Cultivating critical media literacy; connecting diasporic experiences with visual culture

Liquor Store Theatre	Site-based performance or visual response assignments in public or contested spaces	Understanding space, memory, and protest through embodied and artistic practices

For art educators, these case studies offer important moves and practical frameworks (See Table 2). Educators watch, learn, and adopt new methods, as is the craft of staying current and connected to our learners. Digital storytelling projects inspired by *We the Diaspora*, oral history exercises drawing on Liquor Store Theatre's methods, or collaborative digital mapping, similar to the *Black Bottom Digital Archive*, can serve as new inspirations for facilitating critical arts engagement in educational settings. Students might analyze institutional collections through an equity lens, curate counter-archives of their communities, or collaborate with local activists and artists on preservation projects. These approaches encourage students to view art not just as a commodity but as a practice that stirs our lives and politics in aesthetic form—one that intersects with civic identity, historical accountability, and justice. Building on the work of Black artists and archivists who have critically interrogated and subverted exploitative processes, this moment can continue to spark critical conversations about representation and power dynamics in institutions and their impact on our communities and classrooms.

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