

Histories in Focus: Disrupting Power Structures and Creating Engagement Through a BIPOC Vernacular Photography Archive

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Abstract : This paper discusses Histories in Focus, a digital archive of vintage vernacular photographs centering Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) subjects. By reclaiming and contextualizing found imagery, the project challenges dominant archival paradigms that often erase or marginalize BIPOC histories. Drawing on decolonial methodologies, Histories in Focus seeks to disrupt power structures within traditional archives by reframing everyday photographs as essential records of lived experience. Central to the project is the interrogation of archival power: who curates, narrates, and decides what is preserved. Histories in Focus subverts the privileging of formal, elite histories by focusing on vernacular photographs -often overlooked in institutional collections. These images provide glimpses into the quotidian, offering counter-narratives to hegemonic representations. The project's open-access digital platform further democratizes the archive, inviting global audiences to engage with and contribute to its expansion. Histories in Focus emphasizes rethinking and reshaping archival histories through interdisciplinary and inclusive methodologies. To root the archive in creative practices that foreground storytelling, collaboration, and reimagination, we will edit an anthology to inspire artists, writers, scholars, and other creatives to engage with the archive. This anthology will be rooted in creative practices prioritizing storytelling, collaboration, and reimagination. Archival images may inspire speculative narratives, poetic responses, or community-contributed histories, transforming the archive into an evolving and participatory space. The anthology will explore how these methodologies breathe new life into archival materials, fostering dynamic interactions that celebrate the diversity of BIPOC experiences. It will also address the delicate balance between preserving authenticity and embracing creative interpretation, challenging traditional notions of archival 'truth' and authority." This project contributes to the broader discourse on decolonizing the archive by weaving together archival theory, creative practice, and community engagement. It posits the archive as a living, contested space for ongoing dialogue, reclamation, and reimagining. The paper invites symposium attendees to consider how creative disruptions can transform archives from repositories of exclusion into platforms for equity and visibility.

Keywords : decolonizing methodologies, digital archiving, digital preservation, photography

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