

Part Typewriter, Part Divination: A Black Feminist Approach to Black Digital Archives and Preserving the Papers of the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home

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Dedication: Ella Turenne (July 5, 1974- December 25, 2021). Ella passed unexpectedly just as we finished this article. This article is dedicated to her fierce example and memory.

Abstract: Black Digital Humanities in the hands of Black Feminist and Black Women's Studies scholars enables historiography and open access pedagogy about Black liberation thinkers in the tradition of the Black Studies Movement.¹ Furthermore it is a subversive model of archiving which produces a counter-narrative to traditional and canonical ways of thinking, producing, and storing work that is coming out of Black liberatory movements, praxis, creative social visions, and knowledge production. For our purposes we describe this as the myriad valences of Blackness experienced, encompassed, and reproduced. This paper theorizes the ways in which Black Digital Humanities can be used to preserve historical documents that would otherwise be repressed and erased in the evolving world of online databases, open access and for-profit library packages. It examines these questions by discussing the creation of the Activist Studio West (ASW) and its efforts to preserve the history of The Campaign to Bring Mumia home. We deploy Black Feminist praxis through collaborative interventions into historiography as a key feature of political consciousness raising. The stakes of this article (and archive) call into question the fundamentals of digital humanities and what it means to develop a digital repository to document Black Radical Political movements as Black Feminists. Research team members, historian Jessica Millward, political scientist Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, Black cultural studies scholar LaShonda Carter, visual culture scholar Ella Turenne, and ethnic studies archivist Krystal Tribbett prioritized introducing students to the major scholarship on creating community based archives, the ethical concerns around this particular type of Black Radical archive, and the political ethos involved in initiating an archive around a figure that has been consistently threatened by state sanctioned historical record. As a research methods driven paper we have focused on concept and theory-building toward curriculum development.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Curriculum, Black Digital Humanities; Activist Studio West: A Digital Repository of Movement Material; Inside the Activist Studio; Activist Studio West; Mumia Abu Jamal; Black Radical Histories and Vulnerabilities, Free Mumia, Black Digital Archives, Black Archives, Black Feminist Theory

¹ Johnson 2018; Johnson 2018a; Johnson 2018b.

“We did it. We built you an archive. The archive is part love letter, part scholarly rigor, all freedom struggle, and my promise to you.”
— Jessica Millward to Mumia Abu Jamal, Email, July 31, 2020.

When we conceived of an online digital repository, we knew that we wanted to document community-based, activist organizations dedicated to the Black Freedom struggle. Therefore it was for Activist Studio West to focus our first collection on the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home (founded in 2013). Award winning journalist, broadcaster, and media activist and charter member of the Philadelphia Black Panthers, Mumia Abu Jamal, was convicted of the 1982 killing of police officer Daniel Faulkner in Philadelphia. A charge and conviction for which Abu Jamal maintains his innocence. Flowing from the decades long movement to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home takes the plan to liberate Mumia from prison, one step further. Led by Dr. Johanna Fernandez (Department of History at CUNY Baruch) and a new generation of activists, the movement to liberate Mumia shifted from “freeing” him to actualizing a plan beyond a legal victory. It was/is a movement dedicated to the moment and afterlife of Mumia’s freedom, that is activists are centered on that moment when Mumia leaves the confines of Mahanoy Prison in Frackville, PA and returns to Philadelphia or wherever of his choosing. Our contributions to digital humanities, writ large, and Black Digital Humanities (BdH), in particular, focus on preserving an archive at risk of loss and that has special significance for the 2020 iteration of young Black Lives Matter activists. Drawing on Alexander Weheliye 2014 text, Kim Gallon asserts that BdH provides a “forum for thinking through the ways that black humanity emerges, submerges, and resurfaces in the digital realm through the ‘racializing assemblages of subjection.’”² BdH allows the digital to be a tool for reflection on the Black experience, recovery of Black histories and resistance to dominant narratives. According to Jessica Marie Johnson, “black digital practice”³ results from bringing code-breaking and code-making instruments into archives that “never stopped talking”.⁴ Johnson writes further,

The brutality of black codes, the rise of Atlantic slaving, and everyday violence in the lives of the enslaved created a devastating archive. Left unattended, the devastations reproduce themselves in digital architecture, even when and where digital humanists believe they advocate for social justice. A just attention to the dead...requires digital humanists to learn from black freedom struggles and radical coalition building that offer new models.⁵

Our roles as archivists, scholars, and practitioners have even more relevance given the uprisings of Black Spring in 2020 and its necessary corollary of a world pandemic. As a result, to paraphrase Johnson, we accompany other black subjects, who have embarked on stem and digital fields, to be arbiters of our lives and Black Freedom Dreams in normative systems of western

² Gallon 2016.

³ Johnson 2018.

⁴ Johnson 2018: 58.

⁵ Ibid.

modernity that we “were never meant to survive.”⁶

The signature program of the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home and founded by Fernandez is called Inside the Activist Studio (ITAS). ITAS is a web-based series, modeled after the popular Bravo (Ovation) television series, Inside the Actor’s Studio. ITAS interviews activists in front of a live studio audience at The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, a branch of the New York Public Library.⁷ Such a format illustrates a central commitment of BdH to be publicly engaged, subject to immediate and hands-on experimentation, disassembling, and the practices of refusal and assent associated with collaborative editing. Episodes feature an interview with an activist to discuss their political awakening and biography of activism. To date it has produced episodes on Ramona Africa, the only adult survivor of the 1985 bombing of the MOVE members and organizers in Philadelphia; and Sekou Odinga who reportedly helped Assata Shakur escape prison in New Jersey in 1979.⁸ To increase the activist presence on the West Coast, the research team developed the Activist Studio West (ASW) as an online digital archive of multimedia sources to house materials from “Inside the Activist Studio” (ITAS) and the Campaign more broadly.

The decision to partner with the Campaign to Bring Mumia home and to archive these materials is not without controversy because Mumia is not without controversy. After twenty years on death row on December 7, 2011, Abu Jamal’s sentence was commuted to a sentence of life in prison, and he was transferred to another state facility. When research team member, principle investigator historian Jessica Millward met Mumia in June 2013, she noted

we took a picture together, and I noticed that he was shaking. In that moment, I realized that he was just as nervous as I. Although he was the one who shifted the traffic flow in the common room just by walking—other inmates moved out his way—the man behind the icon was vulnerable. He is relearning things most of us take for granted.⁹

⁶ Johnson 2018: “Markup Bodies” quoting Audre Lorde.

⁷ The Schomburg Center is one of the world’s leading cultural institutions devoted to the research, preservation, and exhibition of materials focused on African American, African diaspora, and African experiences.

⁸ Inside the Activist Studio: Interview with Ramona Africa. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_W3vROsy-0Vs.

⁹ Millward 2014.



Jessica Millward and Mumia Abu Jamal, Mahonoy Prison, Frackville, PA, April 22, 2017.

Photo Courtesy of Jessica Millward

Defending Mumia Abu Jamal continues to be an accused, stigmatized, acrimonious activist and scholarly practice. The campaigns surrounding his life and ideas suffer from heightened state surveillance, organized anti-Black protest, and a high level of what scholars refer to as “racial resentment.”¹⁰ Like many of those who believe Mumia is innocent of the charge of murder in the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, the building of an archive, is a political act. The Campaign serves as the anchoring point for our digital repository because: 1) movements associated with Abu Jamal (and other Black Radical activists) have the potential to not be documented in any kind of formal way; 2) ASW like other Black Feminist historical researchers concludes that state archives are inherently violent; 3) Black radical activist campaigns have a decidedly anti-state rhetoric that will not be archived because it is an indictment of the state and therefore criminalized; 4) though Black Radical activists, themselves, have generated extensive collections of materials, we can contribute by creating a permanent and public digital space that houses their materials and documents their praxis while they are enacting social change; and 5) ASW is invested in narrativizing and historicizing lived experience in order to divorce Abu Jamal and other activists

¹⁰ Wilson and Davis 2011: 117-133.

from their iconography, thereby engaging with them as real people.¹¹ Historian Jessica Millward writes “Do I think Mumia is innocent? Yes. Even if I did not believe in his innocence, I still believe in the redemptive power of the human spirit. And believing in the human spirit requires being honest, vulnerable, and not letting go of hope”.¹²

We are crafting an archive with the persons and movements that are allowing us to become part of the curatorial efforts toward their history. An anti-icon archive invites and enables users to engage it critically, understand that archives are crafted and created spaces, and inspires leaderful reflections (like Ella Baker) and emergent strategies (thinking with Adrienne Maree Brown) instead of an uncritical deference to the past. One only has to look at his prolific bibliography to know that Mumia’s writings are part type writer and part divination.¹³ However, when we allow figures like Mumia Abu Jamal to be everyday people, our archive invites users to experience awe at the process of consciousness transformation and courage in the people and movements that we include without turning them into caricatures or putting them on a pedestal.¹⁴ Thus, our philosophy and method of the archive offers a distinctive political historical contribution that nourishes and even directs how users engage it, in a transparent fashion.¹⁵ This approach reflects a commitment to building an archive that contributes explicitly to a living and thriving political education about a politics of liberation that is not frozen or stuck in time. Instead our hope is that users and producers alike are transformed by nuanced and rich conversations with real people and movements and complex ideas. It is also our hope that the Activist Studio West not only documents the Campaign and what could one day be missed moments, critical moments, and necessary moments, but we are constructing an archive that introduces future generations of activists and students to Mumia Abu Jamal.

¹¹ Personal Conversation, May 4, 2020. Jessica Millward. PI Millward has known about the Mumia case for some time along with Johanna Fernandez. Millward after meeting with Mumia face to face has maintained a multi-year correspondence and shared research interest.

¹² Millward 2014.

¹³ Millward 2020. Mumia continues to write books via a typewriter which is an early version of the word processor. He can only see one line at a time.

¹⁴ Davis 1994: 37-45.

¹⁵ Jimerson 2006: 19-32.



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/cbmhome/>

The Limits of Digital Humanities

Our contribution to Black Digital Humanities (BdH) reckons with the fact that official archives fail Black people in general, and more specifically, Black Radicals, marking their ideas and lives as unfit for the archive.¹⁶ Ironically, it is precisely such ideas and lives that outfit us for remaking the present. Embedded within the traditional archival collections of materials, documentation, and artifacts exists the silence and often complete erasure of the lived experiences and histories of marginalized communities, what constitutes the ideological and material power of the archive. Traditional archives are projects of the state that represent boundaries, classification, categorization and other taxonomies deemed significant. The politics of archive organization has been challenged by archivists of color thinking critically with the harms done to oppressed people by the traditions of archive training. By “engaging with the limits and possibilities of the archive as a site of knowledge production, an arbiter of truth, and a mechanism for shaping narratives of history,” Activist Studio West works subversively to claim the importance of Black Radical voices and movements, as well as to provide open access of the material to the larger public.¹⁷ As Rodney Carter writes:

¹⁶ Quan and Willoughby-Herard 2013: 109-116; Willoughby-Herard 2014: 225-235.

¹⁷ Brown 2005.

The archive, as a reflection of and the source of state power, is extremely selective when deciding what gets in. Only those voices that conform to the ideals of those in power are allowed into the archive; those that do not conform are silenced. Those marginalized by the state are marginalized by the archive. Archival violence is found in the use of documents to enforce and naturalize the state's power and in the active silencing of the disenfranchised. The records of the marginalized are denied access and entry into the archive as a result of their peripheral position in society.¹⁸

The Free Mumia Campaign and the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home are dually campaigns and community-based archives, “independent, grassroots efforts emerging from within communities to collect, preserve, and make accessible records documenting their own histories” that combat the “symbolic annihilation” of Black Radical activists and activists by traditional archives built and centered on white supremacist philosophy and practices.¹⁹ As a partner of these campaigns, ASW answers calls by the academic archives professionals and scholars for institutional-community partnerships that move towards reparative or community-centered archives.²⁰ The holistic processes taken by reparative and community-centered archives acknowledge institutional legacies of racism and exclusion from archives, and center historically marginalized voices throughout the archival process of identification, preservation, description, and dissemination of records by working in concert with communities who are, and who have always been, memory-keepers of their own histories.²¹ But more than this, we engage readers/viewers to “skim, curate, and comment; indulge in media annotation.”²²

What Is Black Digital Humanities?

Activist Studio West is in conversation with the *longue duree* of scholars and activists whose work has been in concert with Black Freedom movements. Abdul Alkalimat at the University of Illinois, for example, has been engaged in documenting African American history and bridging the information divide for decades. His curating of the H-Afro-Am listserv disseminates information relevant to scholars and practitioners alike. He curates two sites: Malcolm X: A Research Site and eBlack Studies.²³ Julianna L. Richardson founded the oral history database *HistoryMakers* to catalog the oral histories of prominent and lesser known African Americans. Most recently, Pennsylvania State University professor Gabrielle Foreman has curated the Colored Conventions (founded in 2012 at University of Delaware); and Angela LeBlanc-Ernest, co-founded the Intersectional Black Panther Party History Project.²⁴ Community based research continues to produce community

¹⁸ Carter 2006: 215-233.

¹⁹ Caswell 2014b: 26-37; Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez 2016: 56-81.

²⁰ Hughes-Watkins 2018; University of California Libraries Special Collections and Archives.

²¹ Powell, Smith, Murrain, and Hearn 2018; Omowale 2018.

²² Johnson 2018: 59.

²³ <http://dhhistory.blogspot.com/2015/07/e-black-studies-abdul-alkalimats.html>

²⁴ <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/>; <https://angelaleblancernest.com/>

based archives and centers of excellence. Examples include the online database, Umbra. Umbra is a joint venture between the Givens Collection of African American Literature at the University of Minnesota Libraries’ Archives and Special Collections, and the Penumbra Theatre Company that brings together thousands African American digitized materials from over 1,000 libraries and archives across the country.

BdH is different precisely because it echoes the larger paradigms present in the earliest activist-led formations of Black Studies on college campuses. Initially, one of the thrusts of most Black Studies programs was to be community oriented, or as Akalimat writes “a black power project in higher education.”²⁵ Historian Ibram Rogers (2012) argues that the scope of nascent Black Studies demands from Black students focused on changing course curriculum and founding departments, funding facilities and research institutes. Black student activists mobilized Black populations (students, faculty, staff, coaches, alumni, administrators, etc.), while also demanding “an end to expansionist policies in Black neighborhoods and academic, athletic, esthetic, judicial, and workplace (including non-academic employees) institutional and individual racism.”²⁶ Engaging the plight of Black people writ large, the Black Studies movement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) sought to construct an intellectual environment that would be relevant to Black students and could produce real world solutions to quotidian issues facing Black communities. Thus, it is not surprising that many BdH projects are open access, contain teaching materials and depend on collective efforts of archivists, activists and scholars to acquire, catalog and preserve records. This approach helps facilitate the creation of decolonized digital archives accountable to the communities they document.²⁷ While the mainstream society *professes* a generalized acceptance of the value of living in a society enhanced by the existence of a robust history of struggle against slavery and Jim Crow, in the post affirmative action era, universities are increasingly under attack for their minor role in expanding Black Studies. Expanding Black Studies in higher education in the post-Civil Rights era has been heavy lifting. The majority of this work has been undertaken by student activists, scholar activists, community-based archivists and movements and campaigns that exist beyond the walls of the university (and dissident academics within). Such organizations and campaigns partner when appropriate and possible with universities, government, and foundations. However, universities face a particularly risky legal burden exacerbated by the catastrophic and highly racialized cultural legacy of Proposition 209, the ban on affirmative action, in the Humanities. Paradoxically, the often stingy and highly surveilled support for these intellectual efforts face death threats from white supremacist local and national organizations energized by even a sanitized and exceedingly ginger approach to the study of Black life.²⁸ Not only is “race a taboo topic” which unleashes emotionally destabilizing feelings of self-consciousness but “having been denied access to a broad range of experiences because of social segregation” coupled with crass consumerism and kitschy Americana, students are often hesitant to fully engage a body of scholarship that implicates them in the making and living of American ideologies, and beliefs that produce significant injury, terror,

²⁵ Akalimat 2000: 70.

²⁶ Rogers 2012: 22.

²⁷ Mecagni 2017.

²⁸ Clark 2020; Tatum 1992.

and even death to Black people.²⁹ While the Black Studies project produces a steady stream of interest, new generations of scholars who pursue advanced research training as part of their development of healthy racial identity development, and increased expansion of democratic values that reflect fuller and truer accounts of the society and the world, universities are not the primary audience or even the most important audience for Black Studies scholarship. Examples include social media influencers such as Luvvie Ajayi whose humor column routinely teaches and cites relevant arguments in African American history; “Black Twitter” which includes everything from scholars, to influencers, to followers of particular hashtags; Jessie L. Williams using his celebrity to bring attention to Black Lives Matters; formally trained PhDs who choose careers outside of the academy; as well as feminist scholars such as Britney Cooper and Tanisha Ford who both published memoirs in addition to their formal scholarly work. To decide to research Blackness is a very political decision that far exceeds the interests and concerns of the neoliberal academic space. Researching Blackness, nearly two decades after Beverly Tatum’s explanations of its affective and psychic impact on non-Black people, has far too often experienced “episodic solidarity.”³⁰ We have not been afforded the material support for sustained and rigorous growth and autonomous decision-making at all types of universities and colleges. Such conditions heighten the significance of creating a digital archive for materials likely to be critical of state-led practices of racial bias and anti-Black racial terror whether occurring in cultural institutions like universities or prominent state archives.

At the same time, open access BdH has an important role to play in making university-based Black Studies available to the institutions and communities where Black cultural life is made, practiced, and debated. Indeed the “information revolution” is a critical set of tools for increasing three key definitions of eBlack Studies: 1) cyberdemocracy, 2) collective intelligence, 3) and information freedom.³¹ Circulating the non-university based interpretations about and studies of Black culture and the organized and ubiquitous challenge against racial terror occurring in spaces decidedly more precarious than even the hostile zones of neoliberal higher education is vital research work. Such spaces while being more precarious also have an enviable history of “being crucial to the black freedom struggle.”³² We have “increased our capacity to produce, store, distribute and consume all texts — written, oral, and visual.”³³ For Akalimat having access to such a seemingly limitless trove of information compels us to become more familiar with ideologies that not only go beyond the ones we cherish but which ask us to reconsider them.

From Ideology to Information to Innovation and Imagination³⁴

By delimiting our interest to radical political activists, and by conducting our first research with a

²⁹ Tatum 1992: 4-5.

³⁰ Boakye-Boaten 2020.

³¹ For Akalimat, the information revolution challenges the ideological stasis that has constrained the first two generations of university-based Black Studies.

³² Akalimat 2000: 72.

³³ Akalimat 2000: 70.

³⁴ This subheading extends one offered in Akalimat 2000: 70.

community organization that has recorded the political activities, campaigns, and ideas of political prisoners, Activist Studio West is marrying the information revolution with another set of i-words, in this case the practices of *innovation* and *imagination*. Political prisoners, fugitive political thinkers, what Joy James refers to as “imprisoned intellectuals,” have been some of the most effective, lasting, and transformative rhetoricians of the Black liberation struggle in the post World War II era.³⁵ The writings of these fugitive political thinkers — some of whom have been held captive for decades — have animated both movements and scholarly methods for documenting them. Indeed, following Wilderson’s insights about nonbeing and the existence of these fugitive political thinkers as captives is a truth of Blackness in 2020.³⁶ All the more reason for our attention to be sited in their words and in the sets of habits that make fugitive political thinkers breathe life into us through their liberation dreams. What better group of cases to assemble and learn alongside if we seek to make historiography shift the ideological plant of their manufacturing toward production of an unbounded Black being, non-human though it may be.³⁷ In other words, political prisoners’ freedom dreams enable us to stand in the violent paradox of Black nonbeing and the insistent drive for liberation simultaneously. This is not something that history can produce of its own accord or because it wants to preserve itself. But it is something that can be done to make “our faces at the bottom of the well” legible and meaningful to us and the communities that charged us to enter higher education in the first place.

A Research Partnership

As a research team we are deeply influenced by the rich debates around Afro-Pessimism and Frank Wilderson’s insightful claims that slavery is the truth and nature of Blackness as nonbeing as the necessary site of production of captivity and abjection necessary for the conception of the human, we also refuse to valorize history on its own terms. We have charged history in the same ways that we have charged cartography and medicine and museumship and anthropology and civil society as coming into existence through vilifying, destroying, terrorizing, and making us *tempus nullius*. And yet our survival has depended on a consistent willingness to and capacity for refashioning what Cedric Robinson called “the terms of order.”³⁸

We are invested in training the next generation of scholars and archivists. To that end we developed this open access digital repository by leveraging key components: 1) the financial infrastructure for a longstanding university pathways program at a historically white Research-one university with, 2) long standing relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), 3) a substantial collection of documents, papers, artifacts, and materials held by a high profile well documented movement campaign, and finally 4) a shared commitment to Black Feminist collaborative research and pedagogy. In effect we applied for a grant opportunity and relied on pre-existing relationships and consultations with senior and pre-tenure faculty colleagues at HBCUs and Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). While this seemingly normal activity should have

³⁵ James 2003: 3-5.

³⁶ Wilderson 2020; Wilderson 2015.

³⁷ Radhakrishnan 2019: 41-67.

³⁸ Robinson 2016.

always netted us the opportunity to work for the university while working for Black liberation, such grants are competitive and rare and not always designed with Black women as principle investigators. Such work required us to navigate multiple scales of political and historiographical research (higher education transformation, philanthropy dollars, student training and preparing the future professoriate, and radical movement organization) with a particular attention to the key outcome of using digital humanities to expand accessibility to this particular movement and its history.

ASW created a robust multi-year research agenda focused on radical Black Feminist historiography that defends the voices of Black freedom fighters. Simply enunciating that the scholarly contributions of decades of Black media, broadcasting, and communications studies scholars at Morgan State University is the high water mark for journalism turns our own ten-campus PWI's sense of its own history on its head. In effect, a campus that has not been able to create lasting transformation for Black undergraduate students writ large has missed the mark. We understood that we were far more likely to be successful at diversifying the future faculty on our own campus and in the University of California system if we led with a set of research questions of great significance to the HBCU. HBCU's in general and Morgan State in particular have a federal mandate and mission to remediate the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow and racial colonialism as these world historical forces have shaped the life chances of people of African descent around the world. These institutions achieve this through marrying the broadest most democratic visions of Civil Rights era freedom schools — ending racial violence perpetuated in and through higher education — with an uncompromising commitment to Black education, defined by expecting excellence and intellectual achievement from people of African descent. We could not diversify the future faculty fundamentally in the University of California using models that prioritize diversity of every kind because such models do not focus on enduring racial wealth and gender wealth inequities that cause premature death for people of African descent. However, borrowing the HBCU principles and goals allowed us to focus on students of African descent and the contributions that HBCUs have made to the pursuit of knowledge.

Also we are attuned to the gifts of Black students on PWI campuses who may have access to resources but may not be able to access them because of being racialized through forms of post-racialism, multicultural racism and what Jared Sexton calls “people of color blindness” In this way, our project, like Black Digital Humanities, itself, began from the presumption that the epistemological and institutional mission of the HBCUs makes a significant contribution to historical scholarship; a contribution that PWIs stand to learn from

The Ecology and Epistemes of Digital Humanities & Pathways Programs

While some projects emerging from this longstanding university pathways program are focused on a model of disadvantaged underrepresented minority students being given the opportunity to become competitive for doctoral education and advanced research training, our research agenda began from the presumption that the knowledge production about Black Digital Humanities (BdH) is actually being produced within Black community and academic debates about the role of history, history-making, and the relationship between Black Radical Politics and media making and practice. In other words, BdH as we define it, affirms that the highest quality and most enduring

research institutions for cultivating knowledge that liberates Black people comes from HBCU's as a major part of the global higher education landscape. While our grantor supports the project on the basis of pathways projects attempting to intervene in and correct racial disparities in graduation rates and hiring of under-represented faculty, the predominant ethos of the grantor's vision is that there is some deficiency in Black communities and among Black people that prevents us from accessing, navigating, and occupying roles in the professoriate. By foregrounding Black institutions of higher education as the apogee for research on media and radical Black protest movements we are using the master's tools to parochialize, provincialize, and humble the master's house. In Audre Lorde's famous and oft-cited caution against the impossibility of the master's tools being unable to dismantle the master's house, Lorde overwrites the lessons of her own writing in *Zami: Another Spelling of My Name* where she offers countless examples of her own biographical emergence as a fugitive intellectual and member of the black radical intelligentsia.³⁹ Lorde, then, offers one of the earliest and most articulate renderings of the paradoxes associated with the work and life of Black scholars.

Indeed the relationship between Black Radical Politics and the expansion of Black-owned broadcasting, publishing houses, literary journalism, print cultures, and journalism has experienced renewed public interest.⁴⁰ From the renewed attention on writers and political commentators like James Baldwin and Audre Lorde to the influence of Black Twitter on public policy making to the study of Black publishing houses and Black film distribution companies organized as significant arms of Black Radical Politics (Black Classic Press, Africa World Press, Kitchen Table Press, California Newsreel, Women Make Movies, and Third World Newsreel), the relationship between Black Radical politics and media practices provides a robust groundwork for engaging Black Digital Humanities as yet a new serious intellectual contribution, research methodology, and important addition to Black studies pedagogy. Our research puts BdH in conversation with the principles and practices of community archives. It makes a vital intervention in the education of Black Studies and archives by engaging Black students in the development of a Black radical digital archive, from archive creation and identification to preservation and dissemination. “Teaching to dismantle white supremacy in archives” entails both educating students about the community(ies) from which they come, and requiring direct collaboration with communities to build liberatory archives.⁴¹ The Campaign to Bring Mumia Home is a particularly significant organization to work with because it echoes an earlier generation of ethnic studies scholarship centered in the Black community. It reflects a commitment to community-centered and community-generated collaborative research for the benefit of racialized communities that have been negatively impacted by the criminal justice system and its effects in producing intergenerational captivity as its *raison d'être*, in opposition to its claims to produce social order and security. Indeed, key philosophical contributions of the participants, members, and audience of Inside the Activist Studio West include advocacy of prison abolition, egalitarian abolition democracy, and the use of media for the benefit of Black people organized to create environments for political thinking that exceed the American political tradition and its liberal articulations of moderation and pursuit of civil rights. While Black Radical Politics has been allied with Civil Rights campaigns to shore up equality of constitutionally guaranteed

³⁹ Lorde 1982.

⁴⁰ Rhodes 2017.

⁴¹ Caswell 2017: 222-235; Caswell 2014: 35-55; Drake 2016a; Drake 2016b.

rights, Black Radical Politics has often had to engage the state and society from the pragmatic perspective of being a demographic minority, stigmatized by the history of enslavement, Jim Crow, and the rise in racial resentment. Simply put, Black Radical Politics contend with what Derrick Bell called the “permanence of racism”⁴² in order to change the conceptual conditions through puncturing the limits of established historiography about the American project.

Conclusion

Partnering with The Campaign to Bring Mumia Home engendered and expanded a wide range of research areas. Drawing on movement materials, writings, and philosophies generated by political prisoners designated by the state and society as national security risks is of unique historical significance.⁴³ Our Black Digital Humanities (BdH) framework enabled us to engage questions about the nature of Black Studies as a field that were essential to its founders. In the aftermath of decades of national debate that pilloried affirmative action and reduced Black engagement in the public sphere as unsympathetic, criminal, and irrational, it is long past time for a re-invocation of a Black Studies capable of creating new and different conditions of possibility for Black people in the modern world. While efficaciously institutionalized in the academy, BdH holds the promise of a return to community based archives and their offering of solace in ways that might enable us to relearn things about Black Studies that so many of us *have taken for granted*.⁴⁴ And in doing so, Activist Studio West stands in solidarity with all of those working to bring Mumia home. Asé.

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⁴² Bell 2018.

⁴³ Chinosole 1997; Hames-Garcia 2004.

⁴⁴ Kaphar 2020.

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