



A More Complete Record: The Case for Archival Partnerships The Radcliffe Workshop on Technology & Archival Processing **Summary and Takeaway**

Friday, April 13
Knafel Center, Radcliffe Institute | *Invitational*

10:45-12:30 Black Research Collections: Successes and Challenges | *Panel Presentation*

Moderator: **Kenvi Phillips**, Curator for Race & Ethnicity, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University

- **Mary F. Yearwood**, Director of Collections and Information Services, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library
- **Lopez D. Matthews**, Digital Production Librarian, Howard University Libraries & the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center
- **Randall Burkett**, Curator of African American Collections, Rose Library, Emory University
- **Kara Tucina Olidge**, Executive Director, Amistad Research Center
- **Dino Robinson**, Production Manager, Northwestern University Press, Founder, Shorefront Legacy Center

SUMMARY

Panelists outlined the histories of the premiere Black research institutions which they represent, and described the resources and challenges which they have experienced. They also discussed the difficulties and opportunities presented by partnerships, and the important considerations for PWIs and HBCUs in approaching collaboration. They explained how many of the librarians, archivists and leaders of their institutions have worked as activists in going into the African-American communities of their area to build collections by them and for them. These institutions work without an “end-game” of ownership, but instead hold workshops in Black communities around the nation to raise awareness about the importance of preserving one’s history. Black cultural institutions also have a history of acting as custodians of collections that live within organizations like churches, fraternities and families. Their mission is to be stewards of the cultural health of a community.

Some of the challenges experienced by institutions with Black collections include shrinking budgets, which limit staffing and capacity, translating physical collections in a digital landscape, and demonstrating the continuing relevance of collections and their value. Many Black collections are still in private hands, and partnerships can help provide support in acquiring and sharing collections, which benefits researchers as well. The Atlanta Area Archives Group is one successful example of this. However, some panelists also shared failed experiences of partnership, resulting in distrust or instances where one institution has walked away with sole benefit.

TAKEAWAY

While disparities between PWIs and Black research institutions do exist, the former should not approach the latter as if they are operating at a deficit. Instead, transparent conversations about mutually beneficial collaboration are needed, demonstrating respect and building relationships over time. Everyone involved in the collaboration should be an equal partner from the beginning, not only at the end of a project in a superficial way.