Documenting and Learning from Our History: Archives as Sites of Social Change

Kacie Lucchini Butcher, Cat Phan, Sophia Abrams

UW-Madison Diversity Forum, November 3, 2021
Ku Klux Klan Honor Society in the 1924 Badger Yearbook, Courtesy of the UW Archives.
The UW-Madison Public History Project aims to recover and acknowledge the history of exclusion on campus through the voices of those who experienced and resisted it.
The UW Archives and Staff in Steenbock Library, Courtesy of the UW Archives.
170 CUBIC FEET
Graduate and undergraduate student researchers have accessed over 170 cubic feet of archival material.
That’s about 30 bathtubs worth!

UW-MADISON PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT

168 VOLUMES
Student researchers read 79 volumes of the Badger Yearbook and 89 volumes of The Daily Cardinal.

UW-MADISON PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT

114 INTERVIEWS | 148 HOURS OF AUDIO
Student researchers completed 114 oral history interviews, with a total 148 hours of audio.

UW-MADISON PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT
Reckoning (noun)

1. The action or process of calculating or estimating something
2. A person's view, opinion, or judgement
3. A bill or account, or its settlement
The front page of the *Daily Cardinal*, March 24, 1909, Courtesy of the UW Archives.

Prom 1924, Courtesy of the UW Archives.

Photo of the Pipe of Peace, Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.
[Left to right] Adela Kalvary, Carolyn Konoshima, Marie Cochrane Gadsden, and Clarice Wruck at the Groves Housing Cooperative, Courtesy of UW Archives.
WILLIAM F. TERRAZAS
“Cesar”
Chihuahua, Mexico

Agriculture.
Entered as Senior from Iowa State Agricultural College.
Thesis: The Influence of Feeding on the Amount of Water Drunk by Swine.

“I traveled among unknown men
In lands beyond the sea;
Nor, Mexico, did I know till then
The love I bore to thee.”

1906 Badger Yearbook, Courtesy of UW Archives.
Reckoning (noun)

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The UW-Madison Archives
The primary purpose of the Archives is to preserve UW Madison, System Administration, and Extension records and information of permanent historical value, provide records management services and serve as an educational resource encouraging administrative and scholarly research.
Archival biases
Archival silences

UW-Madison Archives, *Big Ten Foot Ball Schedule, 1921*
And today?
UW Archives Student Historian Program

STUDENT HISTORIAN PROGRAM AT UW ARCHIVES
HOW A NEW, PAID POSITION BRINGS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TO THE ARCHIVES

ABOUT THE POSITION

- "STUDENT HISTORIAN IN RESIDENCE AT UW ARCHIVES" PROGRAM, 2018-2019 AS A PILOT YEAR
- PAID HOURLY STUDENT STAFF POSITION, $12.00/HR
- INITIALLY CREATED FOR RESEARCH, BUT FLOURISHED INTO OUTREACH AND PEER EDUCATION
- INITIALLY FUNDED BY GRANT, NOW INSTITUTIONALIZED THROUGH THE UW LIBRARIES SYSTEM

STUDENT HISTORIAN PROJECTS

- RESEARCH ON VIETNAM WAR-ERA CAMPUS ACTIVISM, INCLUDING THE 1969 BLACK STUDENT STRIKE & OTHER CONTEMPORARY EVENTS
- FACILITATING WORKSHOPS FOR PEERS SUCH AS "QUEER HISTORY NIGHT", WI-IDEAS LUNCH DISCUSSION, "SNAPSHOT" ACTIVITIES, & PRESENTATION TO STUDENT GOV'T LEADERS ABOUT MAINTAINING CAMPUS MEMORY
- CREATING A TEACHING KIT ABOUT 1969 BLACK STUDENT STRIKE FOR USE IN CLASSROOMS, COMMEMORATING THE STRIKE'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY, ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITY FEEDBACK THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS
- CONTEMPORARY STUDENT ACTIVIST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
- REGULAR BLOG POSTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE
Student Historian Experience

- Two academic years
- Mostly remote
- Develop project over the course of a year
- Weekly Check-Ins
- Explore topic that I’m passionate about
- Learn oral history and archival skills
Why it is important to do this work as a student?
Death to Western Traditions by Taj Matumbi
Medium: collaged found paper, tissue paper, and acrylic paint on paper.
Dimensions: 14" x 17" Year: 2019
Black Artists at the UW

- Why?
  - State Street Murals
  - Spring 2020: Journalism Project focused on Black artists + Afro-American 242: Intro to African American Art introduced me to African American art history
  - I wanted to explore the intersection of Blackness and art at UW-Madison
    - No comprehensive research

- Initial Research
  - Looked through the Daily Cardinal and the Badger Herald
  - Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association Report on Black Artists
  - Social Media

- How were the artists selected?
  - Narrowed down artist list to artists who I could get in contact with
  - Artist(s) from each decade since 1970
  - October to November 2020: outreach

- Interviews:
  - Conducted over Zoom
  - Mostly over 2020-21 Winter Break
  - Some in the summer: Jay Katelansky and Prof. Freida High Wasikhongo Tesfagiorgis

- Exhibition
Interviewed Artists

Professor Freida High Wasikhongo Tesfagiorgis, MFA ‘69
Professor Jerry Butler, MFA ‘72
Beth Ritter Perry, MFA ‘86
Amos Kennedy Jr, MFA ‘98
Professor Trenton Baylor, MFA ‘99
Professor Tyanna Buie, MFA ‘10
Roger Allan Cleaves, MFA ‘11
Vivian Cruickshank, BS ‘11
Professor Tanya Crane, MFA ‘14
Alex Jackson, BFA ‘15
Tanya Crane, MFA ‘15
Gillian Drier, BS ‘17
Anwar Floyd-Pruitt, MFA ‘20
Shiloah Coley, Studio Arts Certificate ‘20
Adjua Nsoroma, BS ‘21
Taj Matumbi, MFA ‘21
Auzzie Dodson, Expected BA ‘22

Emerging Themes From Interviews

- Social Movements
- Vietnam War, Black Power, BLM, Trump, BLM
- Creating Black Art
- Pressure
- Isolation
- Naming
- Acceptance
- Community
- Affirmation

Cage Free VS Free Range Taj Matumbi.
Medium: Acrylic, oil stick, and paper mounted to canvas
Dimension: 61"x61" Year: 2020
Affirming Self and Community Through Art

- Constant theme of art through social change

Shiloah by Shiloah Coley, (2020) Oil and acrylic paint on collaged wood cutouts 24x2. Courtesy of Coley.
I hope, you know, to this day, I can still find ways to inspire, you know, young kids, especially those of color to get into art, you know, whether it be design or fashion or, you know, whatever. Just because I think the world needs more of that, and it helps to see, you know, it helps us see others that look like you doing it because sometimes if you're not exposed to that, you don't think you belong in that space, and you absolutely do belong. So just showing that I thought was just really, really important.
“And in that course, I realized that I wasn't going to be the first African American artist. I found out that all sorts of people who African American artists, and [were] very good. The one thing that just blew me away was to was was the the whole story of Edmonia Lewis, who was incredible [and] had to go through a lot of degradation. And her work was brilliant.”
“But with my seminar students who were registered in my course that I was teaching for both Afro-American Studies and the Art Department. And I did a number of traditional African art shows. And the main reason was to bring the knowledge of black culture, African and African Americans to the campus to give it visibility. And with the exhibitions, I often had lectures.”
“Some of the biggest challenges early on were what I think the biggest challenge that the whole department of Afro-American Studies had was legitimacy.”

“In fact, some of my students say that some of the best experiences they had those experiences were meeting Black artists. You know, Vicki Meeks always talks about the fact that she met Elizabeth Catlett, when we took a tour took a trip to Howard University, you know, and she went on to develop her career and just soar in the arts. She also invited Elizabeth Catlett, and many other artists, you know, where she worked out of the South Dallas Cultural Center. So, I think we have role models, Margaret Burroughs, was my role model, Rosalind Walker and African art was critical mentor.”
March 5-15, 1973

3rd Black Student Art Exhibit; 1st with catalogue.

Photo: Freida High
Curator: Freida High reviewing Suku helmet mask of Congo while installing *Traditional Art of Sub-Saharan Africa*, Memorial Union Art Gallery, UW-Madison, October 2-29, 1972. On display: 100 works, including masks, figures, textiles, spanning Mali to South Africa; on loan from the Field Museum of Natural History (Maude Wahlman) and African Studies Program faculty. Suku—collection of Dr. Crawford Young (1931-2020), a strong supporter of Afro-American Studies; mask is now in the Chazen Museum of Art Collection.

Photo and Text: from F. High
Interest in Afro-American Studies grows on campus and in the international arena

By Binyu Cahn
Herald Staff Writer

In the past five years, people have taken an accelerated interest in the Afro-American Studies program, according to a UW professor of Afro-American and Contemporary African Art History.

Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis said she believes this interest is due to the new courses offered in the Afro-American Studies program and the general enthusiasm people have for cultural diversity on this campus.

Afro-American Studies programs are also growing on other campuses across the United States.

Melvile Kate Asante, chairperson of the Department of African American Studies at Temple University, said Temple’s program has increased because people are realizing the significance of learning about their own culture as well as others.

Asante said that black students are eager to learn about their own culture and the philosophers behind it.

“People should also be an important focus of Afro-American Studies,” Tesfagiorgis said.

“Scholars cannot look themselves in an `empty vessel, doing research without interacting with people,’” she said.

A new area of focus for Afro-American studies programs nationwide will investigate black women’s issues, Tesfagiorgis said.

According to Tesfagiorgis, black women are struggling to make changes.

The education system is also making changes by appointing multi-cultural consultants, Tesfagiorgis said.

“In the school system, teachers are trying to find additional material,” she said. “They call on consultants because they were never exposed to this material.”

The media and businesses are also calling on consultants because of their need for cultural diversification, Tesfagiorgis said.

Afro-American studies are also growing worldwide, Asante said.

Tesfagiorgis/Photo by Asante


Badger Herald Article. Courtesy of Professor High
Art installment made by students addressing race issues destroyed within two hours of its unveiling

Two hours after its creation, passersby destroyed an art installment reacting to the event at Ferguson, which was made by two UW students at the George L. Mosse Humanities Building Tuesday evening.

The piece featured a black hooded sweatshirt hung upside-down from a walkway on the building with the words, “Black be nimble, black be quick, black be dead white magic trick,” written on the sidewalk in dark-colored duct tape.

Alex Jackson and Jay Katelansky collaborated on the piece, a project that has been about two weeks in the making.

“The piece isn’t just about Ferguson,” Katelansky said. “It’s about a long discourse in the history of the disposing of black bodies, and it’s important. We wanted to put this on campus because there’s conversations around this topic, and we think that it’s necessary.”

Both students are studying painting at UW. Jackson is a fourth-year student and Katelansky is a second-year graduate student. The idea behind their installation was fueled by the events that have been ongoing in Ferguson as well as the general reaction to “black deaths” in the media.
Tanisha Redict, MFA ‘07
Ceremonial Conurbatio

Tyanna Buie MFA ‘10
Left: Thesis Exhibition, Detail #1 Right: There’s Always a McDonald’s

Roger Allan Cleaves, MFA ‘11
Left: Thesis Exhibition, Detail #1 Right: Sloppy Kisser
Hoodwinked
Jay Katelansky 2016 Chazen MFA Show
Hoodwinked Jay Katelansky 2016 Chazen MFA Show
Next Steps

- Exhibition
- Paper
- Archived Interviews

Backlash Blues Taj Matumbi.
Medium: acrylic paint, vinyl and mixed media collage.
Detail shot of larger 8x22’ installation. 2020
For further information:

- Public History Project website: https://publichistoryproject.wisc.edu/
- UW Archives website: https://www.library.wisc.edu/archives/
- Presentation by 2020/2021 Student Historians: https://youtu.be/T2NSr_RFW8Q
Thank you and questions?

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