Digital Community Engagement

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“Send Out a Little Light”

*The Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive*

Julia Brock, Elayne Washington Hunter, Robin Morris, and Shaneé Murrain

Introduction

*Julia Brock and Robin Morris*

Digital community engagement relies on building and sustaining relationships with a particular public. Sometimes, as in our case, a digital project is not necessarily the most valuable and enduring outcome. What does matter is that a past is uncovered and examined, and reflexive partnerships between institutions make that possible: both history and society are thus served in our projects. This chapter about the *Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive* is a study in the challenges and successes of digital community engagement.¹ The archive is a growing compendium of records (texts, images, and three-dimensional objects) about the church, originating with service-based work by staff at the University of West Georgia and Agnes Scott College along with the articulate vision and community-based work of church members. In this chapter, our project members reflect on building and sustaining the archive, emphasizing the material process of working in collaboration with each other. Contributors, each of whom authored her own section of the chapter, consider the practical and ethical realities of work grounded in living partnership and inflected by digital technology. We hope to describe a kind of praxis that will avail in other contexts. In the conclusion, we offer milestones that we missed along the way that may help others who are undertaking similar collaborative work.

Our labor is framed by a number of commitments: to ethical, public work; to emerging practices in our field; to critical assessment of power
dynamics at play in university-community partnerships; to the value of working with and training students; and, above all, to telling the history of Antioch A.M.E. Church. The project might be classified as digital public history, or something distinct from digital humanities and digital history, what Sharon Leon notes as “formed by a specific attention to preparing materials for a particular audience—to address their questions, to engage with them, to target a real conversation with the public about a particular aspect of history.” The project is also informed by community archiving, an emergent practice in the archival field in which archivists act in consultative roles, and historic artifacts and records continue to be stewarded by the communities in which they matter most.

The *Antioch A.M.E. Digital History Project* is a community-generated repository of artifacts, images, oral histories, and documents that trace the history of the church in concert with its 150th year celebration in 2018. The church, which today thrives in Stone Mountain, Georgia, was the first African American church founded in Decatur, near Atlanta. Since its founding, Antioch has been engaged in ministering to the spiritual welfare of its congregants while also acting as a cultural and social bulwark—from serving as a place of education for newly freed men and women in 1868; speaking publicly against the Atlanta Race Riot in 1906; hosting lectures in Black history in the 1930s; ministering to AIDS patients in the 1980s; and today, through its Social Action Committee, focusing on pressing community issues. The church has been a force of gravity in the community, drawing parishioners for services, weddings, funerals, holiday meals, and homecomings. Despite this role, and its historic place in the heart of downtown Decatur, church records have not been housed in institutional repositories. Instead, members of its congregation preserved records and recorded histories of the church, which they saved and stewarded in family homes and the church itself. Those preservationists are the reason this archive exists.

The project began under the initiative of church members. In early 2015, church member Tigner Rand approached Julia Brock, newly arrived at the University of West Georgia’s Center for Public History, about beginning an oral history project. Rand was the church’s newsletter author and
had attempted to find information about the history of the church. He came upon the work of public historian David Rotenstein, who has documented the effects of gentrification and urban renewal in Decatur, particularly the perilous consequences for the once-thriving Black community that surrounds the town. Rotenstein’s work offered the inspirational clue for Rand in his search for the past, and Rotenstein encouraged Rand to actively document the history of Antioch by recording the memories of elderly church congregants.

Brock’s conversation with Rand began with an interview project as one outcome, but funding options required us to broaden our view. The most likely starting place for support was Georgia Humanities (GH), our state National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)-affiliated organization, which offered small programming grants for history and humanities projects but only rarely funded oral history projects. The requirements of the grant, including a public program and the addition of a humanities scholar, shifted our plans to an event-based celebration of church history. We devised a History Day program at the church during its original homecoming month in July (a new homecoming celebration was added to the church calendar in September to recognize its move to Stone Mountain in 1996). We created a programming committee: church members Elayne Washington Hunter and Calvin Washington, siblings whose family had been connected to the church since the nineteenth century; Robin Morris, a history professor at Agnes Scott College who joined as our humanities scholar; and Elyse Hill, an African American genealogist.

We began building components of the project before our event in July. As a project team, we wanted to capture the strong intergenerational population of the church. To that end, we planned and conducted an intergenerational oral history day to bring the children and the elders of the church into conversation. On a Saturday morning, Morris trained about eight middle-and high-schoolers in oral history methods. Unfortunately, we were not able to record interviews since we had not gotten out the word sufficiently to ensure a strong elder presence on that day. Thankfully, a couple of elders did join the group later and shared memories of holidays and baptisms. In the future, we might do training one week, and then include the children to a greater extent
in the History Harvest with an oral history booth. We also want to record the youths’ own recent memories of the church to highlight that the congregation is now building its seventh and eighth generations.

The History Day program, which took place in July 2016, had two goals: to offer guidance for interested church and community members in preserving family and church records, and to digitize church records in the form of a History Harvest. University of West Georgia archivists Shaneé Murrain and Blynne Olivieri led a session on preserving documents and photographs, while Elyse Hill offered a workshop on African American genealogical research. In addition, Larry Rivers, a historian at the University of West Georgia, gave a talk on the history of the A.M.E. Church, particularly focusing on Antioch’s development within that larger narrative.

The History Harvest yielded the records that Rand, Hunter, and Washington hoped to locate—photographs, documents, and objects that illuminated the church’s rich past. In the months leading up to the History Day program we scanned church members’ collections and built a small cache of digital reproductions. During the event we continued our scanning and photographing, thanks to a number of UWG public history graduate students and interns.

History Day proved a success, drawing well beyond church members to those from the community. Over fifty people attended, mostly church members but also other public historians and community members working to document African American history in Dekalb County. Most church members responded to the day with enthusiasm. One respondent to a post-event survey said, “I really enjoyed the day,” and that only “longer sessions and break-out sessions with [the] experts” would have improved it. Another said the day was “very comprehensive, detailed, and thorough!”

Some members who attended were wary of the project’s goals and outcomes, and expressed mistrust at the participation of the mostly white UWG group of staff and students. A woman whose family was rooted in the church assumed that we were there to scan records in order to make a profit from their collection. Although this was never our aim, this points to a well-founded fear based in a history of white exploitation of communities of color.
The woman went on to question why the church, or even her family, could not run an archive without the help of a predominantly white institution (PWI). This highlights a key issue of privilege and community partnerships: saying “yes” to a partnership without questioning whether a PWI was the most appropriate partner for the church. Our first interface as public historians with a community partner is often consultative; when we are considering what projects to move forward, it is critical to think not only about our standing commitments and resources but whether or not we are truly serving the community partner.

The critique of the church member also raised the issues of ownership and control over access. The physical objects remained in the hands of their original stewards, but the digital reproductions were another story. Consent forms first reflected the risk-averse nature of the university. Donors signed over copyright of the scans to the University of West Georgia, the institution that would house and manage them. But as Leon argues, public historians have to consider the “use and reuse” of digital content—in this case, it is important to add (as others have elsewhere) that we must confront the ethical implications of reuse. The digital archive made it so donors did not have control over how their material was used on the web. After History Day, we attempted to remediate the lack of control by adopting a Creative Commons licensing structure on the consent forms. So far we have employed this language in oral history consent forms, though we have not scanned additional items and thus have not used the updated permissions form for digitization. Those who donated objects and papers for scanning consented that the material would be publicly accessible on the web, while the physical artifacts remain in personal collections.

By the end of summer 2016 we had enough of a collection to begin building the digital archive. As Sheila Brennan has argued, “Doing any type of public digital humanities work requires an intentional decision from the beginning of the project that identifies, invites in, and addresses audience needs in the design, as well as the approach and content, long before the outreach for a finished project begins.” With the church members as a primary audience in mind, Brock chose Omeka, created by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for
History and New Media at George Mason University, as the platform on which to build. It met several requirements for our use: it is free and open-source; has a user-friendly interface students can easily learn and use; has a structured metadata schema for archival objects; and includes features that allow for community interaction. Graduate and undergraduate students played an important role in researching and adding metadata to individual items in the Omeka database, using guidelines from the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG). The site is poised to be indexed in the DLG, which also serves as a content hub of the Digital Public Library of America, which will allow for greater discoverability of the archival material.

We continued our work to some extent after History Day, aided by new leadership in the church. In 2017, Pastor Vandy C. Simmons accepted an assignment to lead Antioch. Rand and Calvin Washington facilitated an introductory meeting of project team members and Simmons shortly after his arrival. At this meeting, church leaders introduced Simmons to the long history of his new church home and asked for a blessing to pursue the project. Pastor Simmons has brought a new vibrancy to the congregation and continues the legacy of community engagement.

We learned after building the digital archive, however, that even when community-institution relationships are strong and the digital product is a resource for the public, that public may not always know about, or use, the creation. Though we do have visitors to the site, we’ve had no one upload additional items, nor comment on content (the ability to do both are prominent features of Omeka). The lack of engagement with the site can only be the fault of the project team—after History Day and the initial excitement of the collection, the team ebbed in its work. This break was due to other professional and personal demands, not to lack of interest. We are currently regrouping and considering new ways to widely share this virtual space.

Still, we continue to think about how to make the site more robust. One avenue is to link the archive to the church’s current ministry. The church records Sunday services for congregants unable to attend in person, for example. Church A/V volunteers then upload these videos to YouTube. We wondered about historical sermons as we built the archive: what did the congregants hear about voter registration or racial violence? What did they
hear about Jim Crow or Massive Resistance or Atlanta’s own Martin Luther King, Jr.? While we have not found old sermons, future researchers can know what congregants heard in 2018. They will be able to link to the video—with the words and presentation—to hear the sermons of this era. The church, for example, has recently been active in hosting political candidates, such as gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, and documentaries that explore current disenfranchisement of voters of color.7

We also continue to attend special events and record contemporary history on the site. We try to keep up with scanning flyers for the numerous social and community events the church hosts. In the summer of 2018, Antioch hosted a community Meet the Candidates Forum in anticipation of the primary elections. They invited candidates for all state and local offices and opened the doors to the entire community. Morris and Brock attended the event and, in addition to learning more about the candidates, took photographs for the record. Church members have also expressed the desire to collect “history as it happens,” and this documentation effort has become another way to build the site.

In January of 2019, Antioch project team members were fortunate to attend the Sustaining Digital Humanities (DH) Workshop at Georgia Tech University. Faculty and graduate students based at the University of Pittsburgh’s Visual Media Institute led the two-day workshop, which trains digital humanists to implement the Socio-Technical Sustainability Roadmap in order to plan strategically for a project’s lifespan.8 This workshop was invaluable for helping us articulate goals and a plan for moving forward. We use the conclusion of this chapter to reflect on these goals and how the workshop brought to light the steps we missed in the beginning stages of our work.

During the workshop, the team listed all of those that were part of the project’s life—from the web server host to the funders to the important role of undergraduate and graduate students. One of our partners who contributed invaluable intellectual and practical framing is assistant professor Shaneé Murrain of the University of West Georgia’s Ingram Library. As mentioned before, Murrain and her colleague Blynne Olivieri of the Annie Belle Weaver Special Collections offered a workshop at the Antioch History Day on preserving family and church records. But Murrain continued to play a role after
the summer of 2016 in helping project team members understand a turn in archival practice with regards to ownership and belonging. The digital archive thus relied upon consultation with Murrain, whose practice is committed to equity and transparency. She now offers a brief meditation on the practice of community archiving.

*Figure 4.1:* University of West Georgia University Archivist Shaneé Murrain talks with a participant of the Antioch A.M.E. History Day in July 2016. Courtesy Mark Greenberg.

*Figure 4.2:* Genealogist Elyse Hill gave a workshop on family history research at the Antioch A.M.E. History Day in July 2016. Courtesy Mark Greenberg.
Figure 4.3: Julia Brock, Tigner Rand, and Robin Morris led an oral history workshop with the Young People’s Department at Antioch A.M.E. church in April 2016. Courtesy Robin Morris.

Figure 4.4: University of West Georgia public history students talk with Sharon Youngblood, a long-time member of Antioch A.M.E. at History Day in 2016. Ms. Youngblood allowed students to scan a souvenir program of the 1960s church groundbreaking in its second location in downtown Decatur, Georgia.
Figure 4.5: A black and white photograph of the original 1874 Antioch A.M.E. Church wooden building. The photograph also features Antioch A.M.E. Church members. Courtesy of Sylvia Clarke via the Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive.

Figure 4.6: A church envelope holding ashes from a mortgage burning ceremony in 1981. Courtesy of Barbara Lowe via the Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive.
Figure 4.7: Historian David Rotenstein documented the 2014 destruction of the last church building that Antioch occupied. Courtesy of David Rotenstein via the Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive.

Figure 4.8: Elayne Washington Hunter.
Community Archiving

Shaneé Murrain

Who tells the story of Black Church life? How that story is told, through years of written and published documentation, oral testimonies and artifacts, is partially informed by both the archivist and the archive. For me, archivists don’t tell the story of Black Church life; the records and the communities they come from do. The Black Church is the expert on Black Church life.

Part of the work of community archives concerns changing the narrative of African American collections that often are not seen as on par with other materials related to American history collected by majority institutions, like PWIs. Pushing against this notion has been an uphill battle for many of us in the archival world, but it needs to be taken as seriously as other resources. We are now working to provide comparable access to these holdings; to build these collections at a similar pace to other holdings; and to use them in our research, scholarship, and teaching. Herein lies the question: what do we want to remember and how do we tell the story? Who is silenced? Why? Who articulates competing and contested memories? Why? Where is the glory in only telling certain stories? How can archival institutions operate in such a way as to communicate that the Black Church is relevant—that it does still, and will always, matter?

One method attends to the role of time and season in the community. A year is measured differently in the church and the academy. The liturgical calendar gives structure and momentum to people’s lives by directing a church’s organization around seasonal and occasional events such as deaths, anniversaries, weddings, birth of children, and changes in leadership. Throughout this experience collaborating with one church and one community member, we found managing expectations about time and success have been crucial to developing genuine relationships. The transactional nature of relationships in academia is often motivated by momentum: an effort to meet deadlines, receive proper credit for a groundbreaking research discovery, or achieve tenure are different measures of success than what occurs outside academia. The church and the academy are alike in that the work of
individuals has greater purpose. The difference is the reward. In the academy careers are elevated, while in the church the people are celebrated. This ethos is important to recognize and critique in community archives.

Complete independence from the traditional archive is complicated by various forms of power. While community archives interrogate the functions of narrative, authority, and memory in our collection development policies, these collections are not created and sustained without financial support. The Antioch A.M.E. Digital Collection project is led by tenure-track faculty and librarians from PWIs that have the resources to support a host of projects beyond a community preservation workshop. In an article written for a series on community-based archives, Yusef Omowale argues, “If we are to restore and document our humanity, we must refuse the spectacle for the everyday. The archive has privileged the spectacle to our detriment.”9 In primary documents produced by African American associations and church bodies we see congregations participating in constructing their own stories and revisiting them throughout the life of the community.

This community archives project is designed to showcase how churches and universities can work together to preserve African American history, and invite intergenerational dialogue and storytelling via oral history. In a genuine effort to build relationships with churches, workshops such as History Day act as community gathering spaces. Community members are empowered by participating in the planning and collection of their stories as they deem appropriate. They also facilitate the preservation of these stories by building a local archive representative of the people and free of the traditional institutional repository. Breaking from traditional roles in archives, we are creating relationships rather than bringing collections in. Absorbing stories is not the only way to build archival collections.

The communal work of preserving the church’s historical records can deepen our understanding of identity as an ever-evolving conversation with the past and within ourselves as educators within the academy.
A History Ministry

Elayne Washington Hunter and Julia Brock spoke on a September afternoon. Prompted by questions from Brock, Hunter reflected on the history of Antioch and the dynamics of the project. As with any interview, the questions and answers are shaped by the agenda of the interviewer, the identities of the interviewer and interviewee, and the relationship of the two. Brock transcribed Hunter’s responses below.

We are on our fifth generation of membership at Antioch. My great-grandfather was James Fowler and he was one of the founding members and one of the first stewards at the church. On every cornerstone of our churches, of the buildings, the edifices, someone from my family has been there. The church on Marshall Street—my grandfather’s name was there. The church on Atlanta Avenue—my father was there. My brother is on the current stone. My grandchildren are members now.

The church was in Decatur and had been there since the 1860s; we are the oldest church for people of color in the city of Decatur. I remember that there was a page in the Decatur history that was dedicated to our church. I always heard that as a child growing up. I remember as a child that Mrs. Lorena Kemp kept the history of the church; she was the church historian. Prior to this project coming together a couple of years ago the church celebrated every year in July until we moved over to Stone Mountain. We moved to Stone Mountain in October and so the pastor at the time, who was our pastor for twenty-three years, changed the anniversary date to October. Growing up in the church I remember that the celebration of the anniversary was in July.

We need more attention paid to the history of our church from our administration, from our leadership, from our pastor, and from the current officers. Since our church moved over to Stone Mountain it has changed so much. The people who run the church, the people who are the leadership of the church, they come from all different spaces and places and times. Before, when we were literally in Decatur, the majority of the people who were leaders in the church came from Decatur. They had an allegiance to the church. That doesn’t really exist anymore because we were a church of 150
people that became a church of nearly 2,000 people. You can imagine how
the dynamics changed.

It’s important for us to know our history. I think it’s important for the
children to know it. Our country is what it is based on the history of the
country and I feel the same way about the church. Our church is where we
are and who we are based on our history. I think that our history contributed
to the community in a way that some churches did not. That needs to be
known. I just think about when I learned some of the things that we uncov-
ered, just the mere fact that these people were slaves before 1865 and three
years later they founded a church, and that church became a school and a
meeting place. You know, it leaves me in awe. I’m just awestruck based on the
fact that my family was a part of that. Not that we dwell on our past but where
are we without it? It’s important for us to document our history every place
that we can because it’s worth somebody knowing about it.

Our project began when Dr. David Rotenstein took note of who we
were. He is a historian who wrote an article about what was happening with
urban renewal in the city of Decatur and how this church was getting pushed
over to the side. Tigner Rand communicated with myself and my brother—so
that’s how I think we all got started. There was money available through the
Georgia Humanities that funded us to do our history day project. That’s how
we started meeting and uncovering.

I was excited by the project because we might be able to let the world
know Antioch, where we came from and how we got where we are. I thought
that we were going to be able to even draw in people who had an affiliation
to the church who were gone away from it. We were going to be able to bring
those people back and have some conversation with them about Antioch.
Some families who had been affiliated with the church for a long period of
time did not go with the church when it left for Stone Mountain. They are
very few families now who were affiliated with the church from the beginning.

At the History Day in July of 2016, I thought that the presentation that
was done by Dr. Larry Rivers was the core of the entire day. I was in awe
as to how he took the history of Richard Allen and brought it all the way
to Decatur, Georgia, and Stone Mountain. That’s how I felt sitting there—I
felt like, wow, this has come all the way from Philadelphia to Atlanta. Also, the fact that people brought archival information to us. Some of them, I was surprised that they still had it. That’s what intrigued me about the day. I wish, however, that we had had more people in attendance.

We planned the day well. I was happy about how we advertised and marketed it. I don’t think we could’ve done anything differently that particular day that would have changed anything. The church members who came were happy to contribute. One of them, though, was very negative about the whole project. She seemed to have thought that we had hooked up with white people who were going to make a whole lot of money off the church and that she wouldn’t be a part of that money-making deal. But it was not like that and I do not think that we communicated it that way. I just think that she came in with that negativism and kept it while she was there, and verbalized it.

We need to have another History Day and I’d like for us to get the current membership more involved. When I say “involved” I mean more knowledgeable. I think we have the capability of doing that. It amazes me that our current bishop of the district is really interested in having all of our local churches deal a lot more with social action and be a lot more community-based. I feel that Antioch started out that way and so I do not want to see us lose that. I’d like for us to continue our project. I really wish that we would have been more involved with the sesquicentennial, happening right now.

I’d like to see a history ministry in the church because the history is a rich history. You have the missionaries, for example, and they do work with the homeless and caring for the community. The history committee would focus on the past and constantly record our history as it’s happening. Nobody is really recording the current history and tying it all together with where we used to be to where we have come to be. I think that’s what the ministry can be involved in. I think it’s almost a given that we end up there based on our early beginnings.

Had it not been for our relationship with University of West Georgia and Agnes Scott College and college students we would not have uncovered as much as we actually did. I think it’s having somebody to be able to do some of the work, someone who is knowledgeable about projects like this,
knowledgeable about history and historical reference points. Someone who has contacts that we can grab and use to help us along our way. I think we should develop a mission statement so that we know where we want to go and what our mission is as a committee or ministry. From there, we should continue our relationship with these colleges and universities. The students, young people, they are learning a lot every day in school, and for them to be able to apply some of that to our history is important. Even the techniques and the exposure—all of that, to me, is important for students.

I think that the best things that have been done in this country have been done through collaboration. I just feel that we don’t stand alone. Had the possibility of the project not come to our attention we probably would just be going on and on and never even thinking about it, other than it being a passing thought—as opposed to it becoming a project. I personally do not think there are any drawbacks to partnering with universities.

I don’t think that race affected our partnership. We’re an African American church and we have a history that started when our forefathers were brought here as slaves. And so, based on that alone, there is a racial side or aspect to what we’re actually doing here. But otherwise I don’t. I think that people are prejudiced from all different sides and from all different angles . . . I don’t think that’s going to die out; I think that people are going to be prejudiced no matter what and no matter who’s involved in the project.

Conclusion

The *Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive* is, in many ways, an example of a successful community-institution partnership. Project partners created a shared vision to address a need of the church, and carried out plans with the help of experts and supporters. The outcome is not only an accessible digital archive but an ongoing relationship between church and institution partners. Both undergraduate and graduate students worked as part of the process, which means that the project also served as training for young public historians. Finally, the process we used and the project we created has become a model for church partnerships championed by Georgia Humanities, our funder, and shared by us at conferences and public talks.
Ours, like so many projects, is also weighted by the burdens we encounter: personal priorities change, key partners move to new jobs, and a lack of clarity about new directions stymies progress in any direction. Though we are all committed to the project’s future at the time of this writing, we are still a work-in-progress as we decide upon future directions. In the following paragraphs, written after a brainstorming session at the Sustaining DH Workshop, we address what we hope other project teams will take as lessons from our process and what we see as key contributions of our work and the future of the project.

The Sustaining DH Workshop brought us together again in January 2019 after a few months’ ebb in project work caused by Brock moving to the University of Alabama. Using the Socio-Technical Sustainability Roadmap (STSR), workshop leaders guided a room full of digital humanists through a step-by-step process to identify the assets of our projects and how we might sustain both the partnerships and the digital infrastructures or datasets we are building and preserving. The workshop allowed our team to have rich discussions about our process to date and about the meanings we give to the project.

First, to the pieces we missed. We came together as a group of people with a common goal: to preserve and share the past. We learned that we liked each other—we enjoyed our meetings, which were often fueled by homemade baked goods, storytelling, and laughter. But we never assigned formal roles to project members, something that was asked of us as part of the STSR. That exercise was clarifying. We determined, for example, that Hunter served as not only a church liaison but as coordinator of project meetings and additional project members (we have decided to bring in new partners from the church congregation); Washington Hunter focused on public relations opportunities within the church; Brock primarily managed the infrastructure of the Omeka site; Morris would continue to work as project consultant, providing support for programming and resources available at her institution; and Tigner Rand would continue to develop outreach opportunities within and outside of the church and provide technical support. Though we had been working in these specific ways for the life of the project, articulating roles was incredibly helpful for making discrete plans for future work.
We also confronted the distance between who we hoped our audience would be (for the archive, in particular) and who actually used the site. In our imagining, users of the site would include those interested in the history of Antioch; in Black Church history; and in the history of Decatur. Those users might be church members, K-12 teachers, and researchers, for example. In reality, the project team members currently make up the primary users of the site, in addition to the occasional visitor from the church. Facing this reality made us think hard about what steps to take in order to connect more users to the site itself.

Finally, we created a timeline for attending to digital sustainability. These actions, based on the STSR, are in some ways common sense—backing up data, storing data responsibly, and creating access tiers to the site and records for project team members. But the curriculum also encouraged us to think about the lifetime of our project. How long do we imagine its life to be? How will we retire the site when the time comes? The workshop leaders ask that project teams revisit the STSR modules every three years to ask and answer similar questions.

This workshop, then, was inestimably helpful and we left after two days with written documentation of our work and a clear, if modest, plan to move forward. Actions include student-created exhibits on the site to interpret the archive’s contents, continued outreach to the church to build interest in the site, meeting with the pastor once again to remind him of our work, and a clear plan for digital preservation. We also agreed to plan for the site’s eventual retirement; we imagine one possibility could be archiving the information at the Atlanta University Center Archive or somewhere that has robust collections in Black history (though we have not approached any institution about this). Perhaps just as important, our time together allowed us to reflect out loud on what our project has meant to us personally and what we think it means in a wider sense. These are the points we want readers to understand:

First, this project did not take a lot of money. We started with a grant of $2000 and drew from our own labor and that of our students to create and build the site. We urge those who want to engage in similar projects to know it is possible to do so starting with little in the way of a budget. As this went
to press, Morris received a small grant from Agnes Scott College to develop a Spring 2020 class for advanced history undergraduates to scan material from the church photographer’s collection and to conduct additional oral histories. The grant also funds rideshare transportation for students to attend at least two church services to meet the community whose story they will be telling. Finally, students will use the Omeka feature of digital curation to create online exhibits using the site’s archive.

Second, ours is one model of creating a community archive without removing objects from their owners, though we must make a critical note. Yusef Omowale sees a danger in “institutionally approved ways to do community-based memory work, with attending certification, funding, awards/recognition, and accountability.” He urges us to “refuse attempts at incorporation which will only further alienate our communities from themselves.”110 In our case, this means at minimum we need to continue to acknowledge the power dynamics of workers at historically white institutions asking for permission to digitize and make accessible the records of a displaced (but not annihilated) community of African Americans. We need to be honest about how these projects benefit the academic partners and the institutions they represent—through promotion and tenure, through the PR possibilities that this project presents of “community engagement”, and in potentially bettering town-gown relationships. We then need to confront parity. What does the partnering community receive in return? Is it enough to preserve its past in small ways or is something greater owed?

Finally, our work is fundamentally built on the expertise of the community; we relied upon the archival and historical work of generations of church members. It was their labor that allowed us, too, to look for revelations in the corpus of accumulated material. The archive tells of the systematic removal of a community, but one that thrives, though different in constitution from its historic membership. We learned about twentieth century Black life in downtown Decatur, and that property and business ownership created a thriving Black neighborhood in the heart of the city. We learned that the church was and is a center of community life and social activism. Antioch, as Hunter said as we were discussing this conclusion, “was a church that helped
the community become what it did.” The members of that church helped the
\textit{Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive} to become what it did.

Notes

1. The title comes from a description of Antioch A.M.E. Church by its histo-
   rian, Lena Harper, in 1957: “In 1868 at the close of the Civil War, every-
   where ruins and discouragement among the people, Antioch A.M.E. began
   to send out a little light to the people of Decatur.” Lena Harper, “The History
   of Antioch A.M.E. Church, 1957 July 14,” \textit{Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive},

2. Melissa Dinsman, “The Digital in the Humanities: An Interview with Sharon

3. David Rotenstein, “Antioch’s Eyes (Updated),” \textit{History Sidebar}, January 29,
   2014.

4. Robin Morris learned of the History Harvest idea from a presentation by
   University of Nebraska-Lincoln at a professional conference of historians.

   Gardner and Paula Hamilton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017),
   60; see Jack Daughertey and Candace Simpson, “Who Owns Oral History?
   A Creative Commons Solution,” in \textit{Oral History in the Digital Age}, ed. Doug
   Boyd, Steve Cohen, Brad Rakerd, and Dean Rehberger (Washington, D.C.:
   Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2012).

   Matthew K. Gold and Lauren Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
   Press, 2016).

7. Antioch A.M.E. Church, “Celebrating Women, Character, Courage And
   Commitment,” March 31, 2019. The Antioch A.M.E. Church runs a
   YouTube channel, which hosts the archive of Sunday sermons, Wednesday
   night Hour of Power programs, and other church programs.

8. The very supportive leaders of the workshop were the Visual Media Insti-
   tute’s director Dr. Alison Langmead and graduate students Aisling Quigley
   and Chelsea Gunn. Learn more about VMI and the Socio-Technical Sus-
   tainability Roadmap.


10. Omowale, “We Already Are.”
Works Cited


Omowale, Yusef. “We Already Are.” Medium (blog), September 3, 2018.