

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) History & Culture Access Consortium (HCAC)
An Initiative of the National Museum of African American History and Culture**



Smithsonian

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Title:

The HCAC Collaborative Model of Digital Humanities Praxis

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PURPOSE

Through a first-of-its-kind initiative, NMAAHC will leverage its brand and programmatic offerings to elevate the collections of HBCUs by engaging 5 institutional pilot participants in the History & Culture Access Consortium (HCAC). Together, these efforts will help in creating a model that meaningfully addresses the digitization, access, and collections sharing needs of participating institutions.

The Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) exists to strengthen the sustainability of historical, cultural, and art institutions. Within the arts and culture sectors, OSP serves as a resource for partnership and professional development.

The History and Culture Access Consortium (HCAC) is a first of its kind initiative designed to create lasting benefits to museums and archives at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) by securing their cultural legacy and enhancing resource availability to make known the under-told history of African Americans and their essential role in the story of America.

CORE COMPONENTS

The HCAC is comprised of six core components: 1) Technical Training and Leadership Development; 2) Talent Pipeline Development; 3) Collections Care and Digitization; 4) Traveling Exhibition; 5) Multi-Volume Publication; 6) Project Evaluation Reporting. The initiative centers the importance of building a community of practice that provides a safe and supportive forum for listening, planning, and implementing strategies that address the staff capacity, digital access, collections management, and organizational funding needs of the nation's foremost repositories of Black art, history, and culture.

The HCAC demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the archives and museums through our collective efforts to impact, empower, and sustain the preservation of African American art, history, and culture on Historically Black College and University campuses for generations to come.

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MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL DIGITAL ARCHIVE

Objectives

The HCAC demonstrates its commitment to advancing the preservation efforts of HBCUs by training emerging professionals in the digitization of their collections to honor and elevate the legacies of these historic institutions. The HCAC Digital Archive ensures the stories—embedded in the artifacts, archives, and cultural treasures of these HBCUs—are conserved and shared, creating a bridge between their vivid pasts and dynamic futures.

Given the historic and cultural value of HBCU collections, preservation and protection of their cultural gems in a digital archive is the consortium's utmost priority. The HCAC digital archive seeks to expand access and cultivate broad interest in Black digital humanities using innovative technologies to preserve and share African American art, history, and culture.

The HCAC is creating a web-based platform that features the progress and impact of the HCAC to include highlights of student learning experiences from the conservation and digitization process, a glossary of terms for use in the evolving Black digital humanities discourse, and a platform for publishing new knowledge uncovered in the work of the HCAC partner institutions.

Collaborative Process

The collections of our five HBCU partner institutions are being digitized and uploaded onto the Omeka-S platform in partnership with the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. This digital archive will ensure full autonomy among consortium members in retaining ownership of their respective collections and their intellectual control while making the resources available to students, scholars, curators, and the general public.

The HCAC has designed a data model application enabling the migration of the HBCU collections into the Omeka-S platform to establish a digital archive that is unique to each site. The five separate collections are then aggregated into a larger open access platform that allows the collections of each HBCU to be in conversation with one another.

HCAC's unique data model is facilitating the creation of effective controlled vocabularies while filling a cultural void in the digital humanities sector. The HCAC digital archive is making possible the sharing of data across the partner institutions, as well as with other existing open access projects powered by Omeka-S, to ultimately augment and amplify previously hidden collections.

Digitization & Accessibility

The project uses the Omeka-S platform to generate an open-source digital archive to ensure full autonomy among participating educational institutions in maintaining ownership of their respective collections. This will amplify knowledge allowing scholars, researchers, museum professionals, writers, and others to gain an understanding of the vast holdings within these cultural repositories.

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The HCAC has equipped each cultural repository with skills-based training for internal advocacy, capacity building, and exhibition design, with a focus on strengthening participating institutions for accomplishing realistic objectives and long-term strategic goals.

Collective Impact

NMAAHC's efforts to augment the digitization and visibility of collections from its five HBCU partners are a testament to the enduring significance of these institutions in the fabric of American history. These HBCU collections are essential to understanding and appreciating the African American experience.

The multi-institutional digital archive provides an extraordinary visual experience to empower scholars, researchers, and the wider public with an unparalleled opportunity to explore the nuances and intricacies of late 19th, 20th, and 21st century African American culture. The impact of this ambitious and comprehensive initiative will create long-lasting benefits that include:

- Worldwide access to tens of thousands of art, artifacts, and documents that promote the study or appreciation of African American life, art, history, and culture.
- A digital platform for continuously adding, sharing, and sourcing new material.
- Individual collections that are better understood and cared for, meeting a requirement for museum accreditation.
- Museums and archives with augmented ability to teach across curricula and disciplines in service to various faculty and students in their universities.
- Increased public visibility of and appreciation for universities in the consortium.