

DGfA Annual Conference 2025  
Archiving America/American Archives  
University of Siegen

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## **Unhaunting the Archive: Toward a Decolonial Praxis of Memory and Representation**

This panel invites scholars to consider archival “hauntings” as a space for critical inquiry—an opportunity not just to fill gaps, but to collectively reframe and expand the archive. Drawing on the pioneering work of scholars like Saidiya Hartman, Marisa Fuentes, Stephanie Smallwood, and Lisa Brooks, this panel addresses the methodological challenges and ethical imperatives in confronting American archival practices that historically silence BIPoC voices. From ledgers and bills of sale of the Transatlantic Slave Trade to descriptions that erase Indigenous lands as “wilderness,” dominant archives have functioned less as an impartial record than as an apparatus of colonial and imperial power. Such archives often capture only fragmentary or distorted representations of enslaved and marginalized individuals, and contain “tacit narratives” (Ketelaar) that represent the power and biases of their creators rather than the lives of the silenced. This panel calls for a decolonial praxis to expand what counts as “the archive,” emphasizing speculative, embodied, and performative practices as tools to imagine and reconstruct unvoiced histories.

In line with a decolonial archival praxis, the panel welcomes contributions that examine and reinterpret U.S. and transnational collections—such as the WPA Slave Narratives, the Colored Conventions Project, and collections at the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture. We are particularly interested in how alternative archives, like novels or land, reshape understandings of history and allow us to speculatively engage with BIPoC voices. Literary works such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Tiya Miles’ *Cherokee Rose* (2015), or Percival Everett’s *James* (2024), along with archival sources like Black newspapers and buried correspondence, act as

“counterstories,” challenging dominant narratives and re-imagining the past from the perspectives of the silenced.

Furthermore, our aim is to explore alternative archival approaches that challenge text-heavy, colonial-era records and offer frameworks for engaging silenced voices. Inspired by interdisciplinary practices from anthropology, oral history (White/White), and critical fabulation (Hartman), we invite discussions on how materials such as collective memory (Eyerman), the cultural memory of landscapes (Brooks, Simpson), and performative or sonic archives contribute to an archive that is not only inclusive but also “living” (Okeowo).

This interdisciplinary panel encourages contributions from diverse fields including literature, history, archival studies, Indigenous Studies, slavery studies, performance studies, and digital humanities to reimagine and respond to the silences of American archives and to explore, for example, questions including:

- What kinds of “tacit narratives” (Ketelaar) do archival collections and archival systems (description, cataloguing, metadata) contain and how can they facilitate (or hinder) our understanding of enslavement?
- How do digital tools and speculative techniques (e.g., critical fabulation) aid in overcoming archival limitations, and how do they navigate the ethics of representing “unquantifiable” histories (Johnson)?
- How might embodied, visual, and performative archives inform new inquiries into slavery, colonization, and Indigenous experiences in America?
- How can scholars collaborate with descendant communities of enslaved or Indigenous peoples to unearth fuller narratives and challenge Anglo-European archival structures?
- In which ways can archives beyond the confines of the US nation state complement and unsettle our knowledge of the history of disenfranchised people in the US?

Please send an abstract of 300 words and a short bio blurb (150 words) to:  
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