

**Format:** Conference Panel

**Panel Title:** Digital Archives and American Studies

**Organizers:** Alexander Dunst (Erlangen), Kathleen Loock (Hannover), Damien Schlarb (Mainz)

Digital archives are ever-present in our daily lives in the twenty-first century, whether we find research articles in academic depositories, scroll through the photographs on our phones, or simply stream music. These ubiquitous, yet frequently invisible, infrastructures have altered the ways that people both within and beyond academia produce, disseminate, and access new knowledge. Digital collections potentially democratize information, change how we remember our own lives and those of others, and invite new conversations about representation and preservation. At the same time, an increasing share of the information stored in digital archives is owned by private companies, disenfranchising the many while benefiting the few. This panel investigates the implications of digital archives for American Studies. It will address archives and their attendant phenomena as both objects of study and tools of scholarly praxis. Some of the focal points of this investigation will rest on the design and function of interfaces as access points to archives, the role of large-scale archives such as the world wide web, and how digitization both transforms and complicates established practices of collecting and sharing information. Together, the contributions to the panel will explore how digital archives not only reshape historical narratives but also present new methodological challenges and ethical considerations for American Studies scholars.

How do digital archives influence the ways in which historical narratives are constructed and contested within American Studies? In what ways do the design and functionality of archival interfaces impact user engagement, interpretative practices, and the democratization of information? How do large-scale digital archives, like the Internet Archive or so-called shadow libraries that provide access outside of monetized publishing, shape scholarly praxis and methodological approaches. What ethical considerations arise from their use? What are the implications of digitization for the preservation of marginalized voices and communities, and how do digital archives address or perpetuate archival silences? What role can digital archives play in resistant practices, documenting abuses of power and rallying political opposition? Finally, how can digital archives facilitate collaborative research, public scholarship, and the dissemination of knowledge beyond traditional academic boundaries?

We invite papers that explore, but are not restricted to, the following topics:

- **Politics of Access** (e.g., how interface design, paywalls, and localization impact user engagement and the representation of diverse voices in digital archives)
- **Ethics of Digital Curation** (e.g., the ethical implications of digital curation practices, including the influence of platform economies, canonization, and curation strategies on knowledge production)
- **Materiality of Digital Archives** (e.g., the physical and conceptual materiality of digital archives, focusing on issues of sustainability and the long-term preservation of digital collections)

- **Digital Methods in American Studies** (e.g., digital methodologies that emerge from the use of digital archives and digital material, including data mining, text analysis, visualization techniques, as well as creative digital methods)
- **Transforming Historical Narratives** (e.g., how digital archives reshape historical narratives and contribute to the contestation of established histories within American Studies)
- **The Politics of Digital Access** (e.g., issues of control, curation, and organization, including the availability of knowledge to less wealthy communities and independent researchers)
- **Archival Silences and Marginalized Voices** (e.g., the impact of digitization on the preservation and representation of marginalized communities, and how digital archives can address or perpetuate these silences)
- **Collaborative Research and Public Scholarship** (e.g., the role of digital archives in facilitating collaborative research efforts and promoting public scholarship beyond traditional academic settings)
- **Digital Future of American Studies** (e.g., the future trajectory of American Studies as it adapts to the evolving landscape of digital archives and the implications for scholarship, pedagogy, and public engagement)

Please send your abstract (250 words) and a short bio (100 words) to Alexander Dunst (alexander.dunst@gmail.com), Kathleen Looock (kathleen.loock@engsem.uni-hannover.de), and Damien Schlarb (schlarbd@uni-mainz.de).

**Confirmed Speaker:**

Holger Kersten (Halle): Free Access vs. Financial Assets: The Internet Archive's Struggle for Democratic Access to Information