

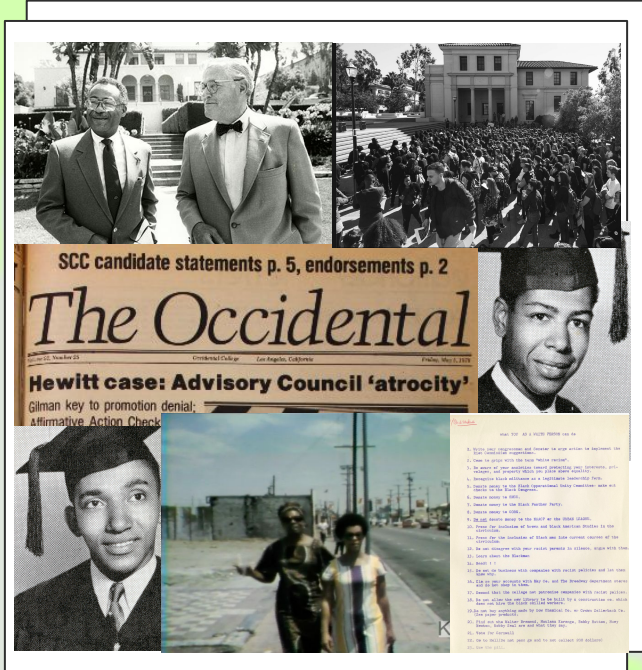


Building a Digital Framework for The Critical Hope and Black Life Archive

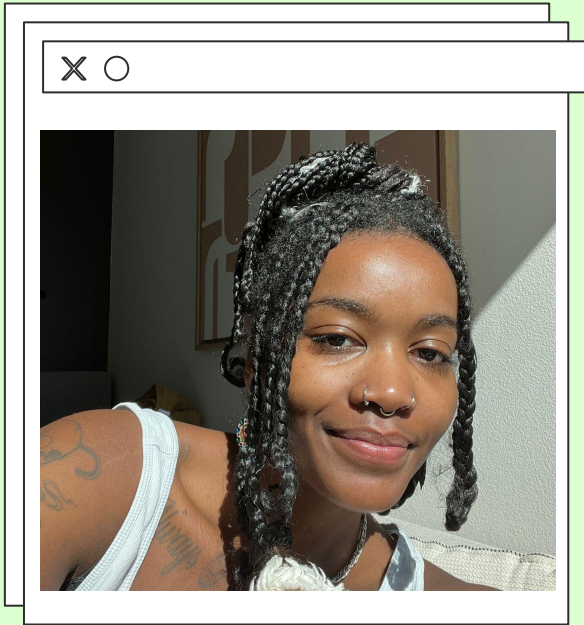
Aaliyah Davis

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MLIS Capstone



Project Lead & Positionality



Aaliyah Davis (they/them/theirs)

As a Black person and alumni of Occidental College ('17), I have a deep connection to this project. My history with this project also affects my lens, as this began as an independent research project that I started with another alumni, Eden Mekonnen '18, in October 2020. We all remember the physical and emotional isolation of the first year of the pandemic. This project brought me purpose, connection, and joy during a time of disconnect and the deaths and disabling of millions. To say that this is a passion project would be a gross understatement. As the digital archive is named, I found a critical and profound hope in documenting the histories of Black community at a place that shaped the beginning of my young adulthood. I am incredibly grateful to the Black students, faculty, staff, and community members who made Occidental a place where I could grow and learn. The methods, framework, and outcome of this project are impacted by my lived experiences of racialization, academic privilege, relationality to the community in the archive, and personal connections to alumni from nearly every decade from the mid 1960s–now.

Project Sponsor

Organization: Occidental College Black Alumni Organization (BAO), the affinity organization for Black Alumni at Occidental College

BAO Liaison: Jackie Provost, BAO Leadership



Problems to Address



Occidental's Special Collections & Archives (SCCA) and Occidental as a whole has a robust digital humanities program **but doesn't have the resources for a sustainable platform**; all exhibits were formerly housed on Omeka and were lost when they switched software. Presently, **projects previously created with Omeka can only accessed using the Internet Archive.**



Select materials are digitized, but **catalog records, finding aids, and metadata of the few collections do not exist in a central location** and require users to search multiple external databases that may or may not use the same terms and categorization as SCCA



Students can only access materials by appointment during the business hours of the Reading Room. Further, a lack of finding tools means **students and researchers do not know what is in the College archives** and would not know what materials to ask for, **which adds substantial time to the work of researchers and archivists alike**

Project Objectives



Archival Access

Increase findability of items related to the experiences of Black student, staff, and faculty at Occidental through user informed database customization

Skill Sharing

Demystifying the use of coding and open source software to create protected, sustainable, and accessible digital collections for non LIS organizations, professionals, students and researchers

Replicability

Create a model for use of open source digital humanities platforms to ensure sustainability of digitized collections

Research & Methods

Community Learning	Participated in cohort with other MLIS student, instructed by the Librarians who created Collection Builder. (Huge thank you to the University of Idaho and the IMLS for sponsoring and hosting the Collection Builder LIS Student Program)
Materials Review	Utilized metadata records, indexes, and finding guides provided by SCCA and records produced during 2020–2021 project work to build out collection plan
Stakeholder Collaboration	Met monthly with BAO’s membership to identify key priorities for the collection and spoke informally with alumni to gain insight on events, people, and controversies that were present in archival materials
Discovery	Utilized existing digital collection, scoured official Occidental web pages, and searched blogs, social media, and external publications for open access materials related to the collection but not within SCCA’s possession

Technology Used



Collection Builder

An open framework for static web digital humanities projects that uses HTML, Jekyll, and Ruby

Github

Repository that hosts and creates website from CB's code

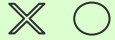
Visual Studio Code

Coding software for the languages used by CB

Google Sheets



Metadata management using CB's preset templates with required Dublin Core compatible terms



John Brooks Slaughter, 11th President of Occidental College

Date: 1989

Creator: The Occidental



The 'Black-white confrontation' Sunday Forum

Date: 1968-01-21

universities civil rights movement

college activism Black student associations

race in America

COMPOUND OBJECT

View Full Record



Mary Jane Hewitt, Scholar of African-American and Caribbean Literature

Date: 1968-10-08

universities civil rights movement

Black educators faculty

Los Angeles, CA

COMPOUND OBJECT

View Full Record

Collection Timeline

1952 to 1992

Year

1952 L-R: LaFald Johnson '79, Janet Stafford '52, George Ellison '52, Claudia Collard '76, and Cleve Gilts '72 at a reception and dinner in 1987 announcing the Stafford, Ellison, Wright Endowment Fund.

Black and white image of Barbara Bowman-Wright and her husband walking down the aisle



Outcomes

Key Insights



Working with stakeholders: My project sponsor is completely run by volunteer labor. Everyone who is on the leadership team makes time because they care about this project. This work was very self-directed, which had many benefits and challenges. Occidental's Special Collections and College Archive was a major collaboration for this project because they own the materials. Having an established MOU was a great help, but this project happened at the same time as a major change in their staff and systems. I had to develop creative solutions without access to high quality digital copies. Luckily, Collection Builder works with what you have and allows objects to be stored and displayed from the links on other sites.



Project management: Replanning and pivoting was a major theme of this project. Working with stakeholders who don't have resources— whether that be time, labor, or funding— required a lot of flexibility. It was difficult to let go of some of the goals that I had for this project, but



Metadata collection: Outside of the code, Collection Builder relies entirely on metadata. There is no room for error in syntax due to the code framework. Significant time was spent on metadata creation and entry, which speaks to the importance of proper metadata management for all information professionals who want their work to be interoperable and findable. Further, when working with community partners, this concept is vital to flesh out and collaborate on if we want our collections to be sustainable and long lasting in the digital world.

Next Steps

1

Presenting project to BAO membership at annual summer gathering

2

Adding a page for oral histories that were conducted with alumni in 2021

3

Creating a guide for students to contribute, update, and maintain the database