



REFLECTIONS ON
COMMUNITY ARCHIVING
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

FILLING ARCHIVAL SILENCES

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As the Fall 2020 semester began at the University of Florida, a months-long wave of social justice protests against police brutality and anti-Black racism loomed in the background. In the spring and into early summer, millions of Americans and citizens across the world watched with disbelief, anger, and despair as several high-profile cases emerged, yet again, of police officers—and individuals associated with White supremacist groups—killing Black men, women, and children.

Breonna Taylor's and Ahmaud Arbery's back-to-back murders in early 2020 revived in full force the seemingly waning Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). BLM originally burst into the public sphere following the 2013 murder of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, and gained momentum after the 2014 police killing of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Then, everything changed on May 25, 2020, when ex-Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on 46-year-old George Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes, despite several witnesses and fellow officers standing by. Floyd died begging for his life and calling out to his mother.

The Gainesville community became one of hundreds of localities across the globe to take action by recognizing, honoring, and standing in solidarity with Black and other marginalized victims of racism and police violence. Aware of the need to bear witness to the



Fig.1, p.16 & Fig.2, p.17 -

Part of the “All Black Lives Matter: Documenting Community Response to Racial Injustice” display.

The display included facsimiles of posters and photographs of the sites, and two of the candleholders left at the UF seal at the 13th St. University Ave. Credits: T. Pennamon & S. Coates

historic moment for future generations, Libraries staff began photo-documenting two of the most notable memorial and protest sites shortly after they appeared in June 2020.

The first memorial site on the UF seal, located at 13th Street and University Avenue, featured posters, candles, flowers, and other items left over from various community and UF student organization vigils and demonstrations for victims, including Taylor, Floyd, and Oluwatoyin Salau (Fig. 2).

University & Community Life Intern Tiffany Pennamon picked up where library staffers left off with documenting these sites. Starting in August 2020 and ending in late October, she took photos of the memorials twice every week to document new additions to the sites.

On one autumn visit, two posters sat side-by-side. One read, “POLICE BOUGHT DYLANN ROOF A WHOPPER AFTER HE KILLED 9 PEOPLE.” The other, painted with blood-like paint, said, “BREONNA TAYLOR WAS BUTCHERED AS SHE SLEPT. SAY HER NAME SHE MATTERED.”

Weekly photographic documentation of the 34th Street Wall just a few miles away was another priority for Pennamon and internship coordinator Sarah Coates, the Interim University Archivist. This ever-changing wall of community art became a “living” memorial to Black victims of racial injustice and scene of artistic activism (Fig.4-5).

Murals and graffiti tags on the wall called out policing and prison institutions and affirmed the value of all Black lives.

In addition to photos, library staff were able to retrieve several of the posters, candle holders, and items from the 13th Street and University Avenue racial injustice memorial site. These items will be included in a forthcoming University Archives collection, where the goal of preserving them is to aid in the teaching and remembering of history and how the Gainesville community responded in these enduring moments of tragedy and injustice.

The collection of the posters, photographs, and other memorabilia from these memorial sites resides now in University Archives. The posters and



Fig.3 - A poster that read, “Juneteenth Break the Chains Free-ish since 1865,” from a participant in the Gainesville Juneteenth protest. Credit: T. Pennamon

photographs will be displayed in a forthcoming digital collection, which will be freely available online. These images will provide future researchers with a snapshot of how Gainesville and the UF community responded to a summer of protests and memorialized the victims of racial injustice and police violence.

The culmination of this months-long collaborative effort to document the protests and memorial sites resulted in the installation of the “All Black Lives Matter: Documenting Community Response to Racial Injustice” display on the second floor of Library West in early January 2021. Here, the project aimed to engage the public about the active voices, lessons learned, and even pushback to the 2020 summer memorials and protests (Fig. 1-2).

Hoping to keep the protest momentum going, Pennamon also had the opportunity to speak with the student newspaper, *The Independent Florida Alligator*, and UF Communications in Spring 2021 to encourage educators, students, researchers, community members, and others to affirm the value of all Black lives—including Black LGBTQIA lives.

Pennamon also encourages everyone to reflect deeply on the items collected by UF’s archives team for posterity. This reflection allows us to deepen awareness of our current social moment and its ties to our history. These ties remind us that we all have a role to play in dismantling racism and anti-Blackness in our sphere of influence to create a better future for all people.



Figs.4-5 - Graffiti art on the 34th St. Wall surrounded by names of victims of racial injustice. Credit: T. Pennamon

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