

Digital Archiving Manual

Prepared by the fellows of the Intersectional Black European Studies Digital
Black Europe Archival Fellowship

Introduction

In July 2023, we, the Intersectional Black European Studies Digital Black Europe Archival Fellows, spent three weeks in Berlin, Germany in order to digitize two archives related to the writings and organizing of Queer Afro-German feminists in the 1980s and 1990s - all extant issues of *Afrekete: Schwarze Deutsche Frauen und Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland*, a journal created by ADEFRA (Afro-deutsche Frauen), a collective of Queer Black and Afro-German feminists, and a collection of masters' and doctoral theses written by Afro-German women in the 1980s and 1990s.

All of the fellows were doctoral students at Yale University. While the majority of the fellows worked on some aspect of Black life in Europe, none of us, at the time of our visit, were working explicitly on Black Germany. Only one of the fellows spoke German fluently. Why, then, were we in Berlin? We were convened by Professors Denise Bergold-Caldwell, Fatima El Tayeb and Maisha Auma, and Katja Kinder and Peggy Piesche. Prior to our arrival in Berlin, the fellows attended a series of workshops in which we learned about digitizing and discussed how we might go about the process once we arrived in Germany. During our three-week stay in Berlin, we collaborated with a large group of graduate students from several universities in Berlin and attended a seminar taught by Professors Auma and Karina Griffith. We provide this context as a way of showing that we did not archive alone and that we did not archive in a vacuum, so to speak. Our work was made possible both by the invitation of the members of the Intersectional Black European Studies (InBEST) project, who we have named above, and the support and the productive questioning of the Berliner graduate students, who are too many to name here, but were instrumental to the project.

The manual that follows is based on the work that we did over the course of our three weeks in Berlin. The documents that we digitized were, for the most part, no larger than an A4 sheet of paper (8 ¼ x 11 ¾ in or 210 x 297 mm). As a result, the suggestions that we have made will be most effective when used to digitize documents of a similar size. Finally, this document should be read as a by-product of a specific archiving experience and **not** as an exhaustive guide to the practice of digital archiving. Our hope is that this document will serve as a starting point for activists, community members, and engaged scholars who want to preserve and pass on the work of those that came before them. We anticipate that those archiving experiences will be unique and may diverge from our own - we hope that those divergences will yield new practices and perspectives that might bring new histories to light and bring new futures to life.

Preparing the space, preparing yourselves

Before you can begin scanning your documents or artifacts, you must prepare the space that you will be using for the archiving process. All spaces will look different and thus will require different levels of preparation. The important thing is not to deep clean your space, as much as it is to ensure that the space will not alter or damage the materials you are archiving. You must also prepare yourself and your fellow archivists for the task at hand. If the archival process you are putting into practice are to go beyond the colonial, exploitative practices that have defined the archives of Black life to this point, a good deal of intention, reflection and care will be necessary.

1. Before you begin archiving, make sure that you have properly prepared yourself for the task at hand. Have you discussed what kind of documents you will be working with? If you are working with an archive that you “discovered”, have you made any efforts to speak with the person or people whose lives are contained within that archive? Do you have the necessary background to understand and contextualize the archives that you are working with? These questions will need to be answered at some point in the process - and if they aren't, they are likely to arise in the midst of archiving, when you may be pressed for time. Set aside time for reflection and conversation in the lead up to your archiving, to ensure that you have clearly conceptualized the archival project that you are undertaking.
2. Once you are in the archiving space, remove all food and drink from the space. If necessary, wipe down the space with a moist cloth or paper towel. Ensure that the surfaces you will be using have fully dried before placing documents upon them.
3. Wash your hands and thoroughly dry them.
4. Determine what you will digitize in the time you have allotted. Be realistic about what you will be able to do in the time you have in the space. Set clear roles for yourself and your fellow team members, if you are working in a group. If you are working with a team, you may want to have each person work on a different portion of the archive. This way, you can scan more documents in the time you have allotted for archiving. You may also want to have members of your team observe the scanning process, in order to take note of best practices and record the ups and downs of the scanning process.
5. As you handle the documents you are archiving, ensure that you are showing the proper level of respect - be certain that you are not doing any damage to the

documents. During our work in the archives, we found that the best practice was to touch the documents as needed to place the documents on a firm surface. Once the documents were laid out, we tried to touch the documents only if it was necessary to turn a page or flip a document over. Remember, you are working to preserve the document digitally, but you should also be working in a way that will ensure that the document is in good condition for future readers.

6. Take note of the order in which you found the documents that you are archiving. This will be important for two reasons: **1.** You may want to mention the context in which you found the documents you are archiving as part of the metadata for the digital archive you are creating. **2.** You will need to place the documents back where you found them once you are done scanning, in order to respect and preserve the archive you are working with.
7. Set up the equipment you will be using to scan your documents. We recommend using a mobile phone or tablet.¹ Ensure that the surface that you will be placing your documents on is well-lit, in order to avoid casting shadows on the documents as you scan.
8. Before you begin scanning, you should decide on how you will scan your documents. Most of the apps that we recommend here create the highest quality scan when you take pictures with your phone in portrait orientation. With this information in mind, you will want to come up with the method best suited for scanning the documents you are working with. Scanning with phones will work better for smaller documents, such as flyers, posters, pamphlets, letters, books and magazines.

Scanning your documents

Once you have set up your space and decided upon a strategy for scanning the documents you are working with, you are ready to move on to scanning your documents. Remember that all scanning

¹ There are a variety of apps available, including, but not limited to, the iPhone Notes app, Scannable, Adobe Scan, and Cam Scanner. Each app has its strengths and weaknesses. We recommend experimenting with the apps prior to scanning in order to determine which will best suit your needs. If you are working as a team, you will likely have individual preferences for which apps to use for scanning. Before you begin, ensure that all the apps you are using are capable of creating the same kind of image or file (i.e. If you are intending to create PDFs of your documents, make sure that all the apps you are using are capable of creating PDF-compatible images.)

processes will differ, based on any number of factors. The process of scanning described below is based on the experiences of the Yale Digital Archives Fellows, who spent three weeks in Berlin in July 2023 scanning documents from several archives related to the experiences of Afro-German feminist activists, scholars, and writers. Given the unique intricacies of your own archiving process, you will want to make sure that you take note of your own process and experiences. You should feel free to add your own advice to this document. The hope is that this guide will grow as more and more archivists add advice gleaned from their own scanning experiences.

1. Check your work as you go, to ensure that you are creating the best scans possible. If you are not satisfied with your results, don't be afraid to try out a new method. For example, we found that scanning apps such as Scannable did not work as well with documents that had non-uniform textures (i.e. newspapers with wrinkles, documents with creases, etc.). If you find that the app that you are using is not working, choose another one or use your phone or tablet's camera instead.
2. Move deliberately through the documents that you have pulled out of the archive you are scanning. Take time to take notes, if you feel that you have found something that will serve as a useful contextualization for the object on the digital archive. If you are working on items like magazines or pamphlets that have clear delineations (i.e. issues), you may want to upload images to the place where you will be storing your scans after you work through a unit or folder or issue.
3. If you find something that troubles you or confuses you during your digitizing, call on your collaborators for help. If you are working alone, make a note for later, so that you can discuss the object in question with a friend, community member, or colleague. These are moments when you will want to look back on your conversations or reflections on the ethics that you want to embody through your practice of archiving. If you are able to speak with someone connected to the creation of the specific object, you may want to reach out to them.
4. When you have finished your scanning for the day, ensure that you upload all of your images and scans to a shared folder. Make sure that the images are organized, whether according to subject or the person who created the scan, so that you will be able to find everything you need as you move from digitizing to organizing the images and creating a functional digital archive.
5. Before leaving the archiving space, hold space for a conversation about the work that you have done. If you are working alone, take some time to reflect on the work

that you have done. Are there questions that you need answers for? Are there parts of the process that did not work that you would like to change for your next visit to the archive? Are there things that you saw or scanned that have brought up strong feelings that you need to share before the process can continue? If you are on your final day in the archive, name what you were and were not able to complete. This is as much a practical concern as it is an affective one - you should not hold guilt or shame about what you did not scan.

6. If you are in a space in which you have been invited or helped by another person, thank the person who allowed you to access the space. Make sure that you leave the space as you found it.

Conclusion

In closing, we want to be transparent about the process that led to the creation of this manual. Our archiving experience was by no means a perfect one. As mentioned before, many of the members of our team did not speak German, and thus were not able to fully comprehend the contents and the context of the documents that we were archiving. While we were in Berlin for three weeks, we were only able to spend a few days in the archives, meaning that we were only able to begin to digitize the numerous documents made available to us by community organizations like Each One, Teach One and community members like Katja Kinder and Peggy Piesche. There were discontents with the archiving process and questions of the ethics of making documents that weren't conceived for a wide audience available as part of a digital archive. There were material concerns - most notably, the fact that the fellows who put this manual together were paid, while the graduate students who were a vital part of the archival process and the larger InBEST project were not. If we bring all these things to light at the end of this manual, it is not to air dirty laundry or to cast aspersions upon the motivations of our archiving project. Rather, we want to highlight that the archiving process is a difficult one, filled with debates, disagreements and detours that ultimately end up leading us to a destination that we had not anticipated at the outset. If you are reading this, you are likely already deeply involved in the process of creating an archiving project. What makes this process difficult is also what makes it so important; the deeply complicated humanity at the heart of our attempts to archive Black life. We have no solid advice for how to avoid these difficulties. All we can say is that we hope that you will lean into the potential of your project. That the possibility of the stories that you will be able to tell and the futures that might stem from those stories will hold you, empower you, and move you forward.

With gratitude,

The Fellows of the Intersectional Black European Studies Digital Black Europe Archiving Fellowship