

Sovereignty, Blackness, and the Archive

The ethical question of how researchers should approach archival work, particularly with regard to archives emerging within the context of colonialism and chattel slavery, is not new. Authors and scholars such as Toni Morrison and Saidiya Hartman have called on us to embrace archival foreclosure as a provocation in and of itself. Engaging the erasures through practices of “re-memory,” fiction, and speculation call us to do the impossible, to inhabit the interior lives of enslaved subjects. In this colloquium, Drs. Sandra Harvey, Erin Gray, and SA Smythe consider the narrative work that the archive and the practice of archiving offer within colonial and capitalist settings discuss the sort of political possibilities opened up through our archival engagements. In “Sovereignty, Blackness, and the Archive,” they ask: what claims do official histories—often the primary content of the archive—but also alternative stories or so-called “histories from below” make towards or against sovereignty?

Thursday, February 21
3:30 – 6:00pm
SBSG 1321

The three scholars will provide an overview of their work, followed by conversation with Dr. Ashon Crawley (UVA) and Dr. Sarah Haley (UCLA). Harvey works through the dilemma that the official archive presents for Black and Native American politics. Erin Gray’s work on the visual cultures of lynching explores an archive wherein the state works to actively forget, and shows how these performances trouble or work with Alabama’s new Legacy Museum, which documents lynching in the southern United States. Finally, SA Smythe recounts a narrative of the Archive of Migrants Memories exhibit, “The Lampedusa Project,” to discuss the ephemeral archive as a critique of neoliberal neglect. They ask after the ways the project emerges as a provocation for a politics of sovereignty through recognition via the Black Mediterranean.



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