



# NEWS

## *In this issue:*

15th Anniversary Exhibit | Digital Collections and Resources | Legacy Management Resource Portal | Oscar Brown Jr. Archives Project | Black Matriarch Archive

# BMRC Marks 15th Anniversary with web exhibit on consortium's history



Objects from the exhibit (l to r): Title page of *Black Metropolis*; BMRC Founder, Danielle Allen (photo credit: Laura Rose); Cover of BMRC Fellows Reunion Program; Archie Motley Archival Intern Donna Edgar

**The Black Metropolis Research Consortium: Fifteen Years of Preserving and Documenting Black History and Culture in Chicago** documents the origins of the BMRC, its efforts to aid discoverability and access to Black historical collections in Chicago, and the consortium's flagship Summer Short-term Fellowship and Archie Motley Archival Internship programs.

The exhibition, curated by BMRC Executive Director, Marcia Walker-McWilliams was set to unveil as a physical exhibition open to the public. However, due to Covid-19 precautions, we are only able to offer a web exhibit at this time. Special thanks to exhibition designer, Chelsea Kauffman of the Hanna Holburn Gray Special Collections Research Center (SCRC) at the University of Chicago and to Dan Meyer and Patti Gibbons of SCRC for their contributions.

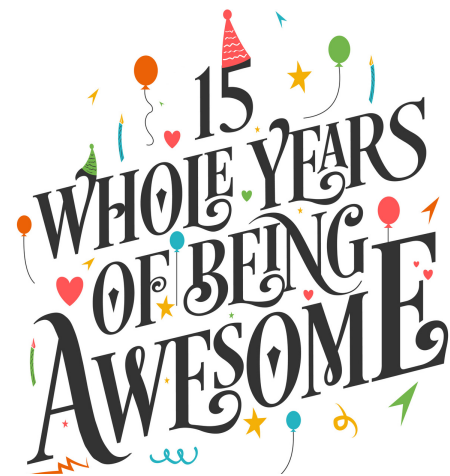
We wish to acknowledge all of the BMRC member institutions, especially the following for loaning objects for this exhibit: University of Chicago, Chicago Public Library, Roosevelt University, Columbia College Chicago, Shorefront Legacy Center, Chicago History Museum and the Newberry Library. Over the years,

# BMRC 15th Anniversary Exhibit

many individuals have contributed to the success and growth of the Black Metropolis Research Consortium and we wish to thank our founders, current and former staff, Board members, committee members, advisors, fellows, interns, volunteers, funding partners and other supporters.

Fifteen years after its founding, the BMRC continues to be guided by our mission to connect all who seek to document, share, understand and preserve Black experiences. We believe in providing resources that enable the creation and proper care of collections that document Black history and culture in Chicago and beyond. We believe in collaboration with our member institutions, partners and Fellows to activate and aid in the use of Black historical collections. And we hope these collections provide the tools for diversifying future generations of archivists and cultural heritage workers. Over the years, many individuals have contributed to the success and growth of the Black Metropolis Research Consortium and we wish to thank our founders, current and former staff, Board members, committee members, advisors, fellows, interns, volunteers, funding partners and other supporters.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on the exhibit, please share them with us!



Access the BMRC's exhibit from the Special Collections Research Center [web exhibits page](#)

## About the BMRC

The Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC) is a Chicago-based membership association of libraries, universities, museums, community/arts organizations and other archival institutions. The BMRC's mission is to connect all who seek to document, share, understand and preserve Black experiences.

It is the vision of the BMRC to be essential to promoting discovery, preservation, and use of Black historical collections. Through consortial programs, the BMRC aids in expanding broad access to its members' holdings of materials that document African American and African diasporic culture, history, and politics, with a specific focus on materials relating to Chicago.

## Connect with us

Website: [bmrc.lib.uchicago.edu](http://bmrc.lib.uchicago.edu)

Email: [bmrc@uchicago.edu](mailto:bmrc@uchicago.edu)



Facebook: @1BMRC



Twitter: @ChicagoBMRC



Instagram: black\_metropolis

# Chair's Letter



BMRC Board Chair, Steven Adams

Dear friends,

As Board Chair of the BMRC for the last five years, I have had the honor and privilege of guiding the organization through quite a few changes and challenges, but the COVID-19 pandemic is chief among them. Ironically, 2020 was a year of unprecedented positive change and evolution within our consortium. We added three new staff members, launched several new initiatives, expanded BMRC membership, and formed partnerships to advance our mission to “connect all who seek to document, share, understand and preserve Black experiences.” Our brilliant staff and committed board members made an impact in the Black collections space across Chicagoland while navigating the pressures of the pandemic in their professional and personal lives. I thank each of them for their commitment and dedication to this work in the face of unprecedented disruption.

In this issue of the biannual newsletter, you will see evidence of the progress we’ve made since our July issue. We hope to update you on our activities and initiatives in this issue, but we’d also like to convey a sense of possibility for cooperation and collaboration with the BMRC. If anything in this issue sparks your curiosity, please reach out to us via email or our social media accounts. We are enthusiastic about serving the BMRC community and collaboratively addressing needs related to Black histories, cultures, and legacies.

Stay well. Stay safe. Stay engaged.

*Steven M. Adams*

# Executive Director's Note



BMRC ED Marcia Walker-McWilliams

Dear friends,

Happy New Year!

I don't know about you, but I'm still processing 2020...and in all honesty the beginning of 2021 as well. But as I listened to Amanda Gorman, National Youth Poet Laureate, recite her poem "The Hill We Climb" at the inauguration, I was struck by the lines: "For while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us." Gorman's words brought to mind the Akan Sankofa concept which reminds us to learn the past in order to move forward purposely into the future. Celebrating the BMRC's fifteenth anniversary this year provides an apt opportunity to understand the consortium's past and envision its future.

This volume of the BMRC News sheds light on two ways that we can all engage Black historical collections from our homes and devices: by accessing digital resources and archiving family and community legacies. Pre-pandemic, we would gather together at the many events celebrating Black history and culture in the city, especially during Black History Month. And while there is hope that we will be able to gather together again soon, we wanted this volume of the newsletter to help bring Black History Month to you.

Consider viewing the many digital collections and exhibits available from our member institutions and using them as focal points for discussions about Black history. We hope you will be inspired by Maggie Brown and Africa Brown, who are working to preserve their father, Oscar Brown Jr.'s legacy. Perhaps you will be moved to contribute to the Black Matriarch Archive, a digital archive created by Alkebuluan Merriweather to celebrate Black mothers and women so influential to many of us. We are so grateful to our contributors!

And we are so grateful to you! Please continue to support us and spread the word about the Black Metropolitan Research Consortium.

Stay well. Stay safe. Stay engaged.

*Marcia Walker-McWilliams*

# Digital Resources at BMRC Member Institutions

Allison Sutton

One of our main goals at the **Black Metropolis Resource Consortium** is to let our broad network know what resources and events are offered by our member institutions. While the monthly BMRC e-newsletter always provides a list of upcoming events hosted by our members, this edition of the *BMRC NEWS* intends to point you towards several digitally available collections and exhibits as well as both upcoming and previously recorded programs. It is not an exhaustive list, but rather a sample of the what you can find online through some of our BMRC members.

## Chicago History Museum

The museum has several Google Arts & Culture exhibits that focus on various aspects of Black history, including exhibitions on the [Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of the Amistad slave revolt](#), Chicago pastor, [Reverend Joseph H Jackson](#) who rose to prominence in the early 20th century fighting for education, housing and economic and political equity, and the vibrancy of Blues as a music genre that traveled from the South to [Sweet Home Chicago](#) and launched the careers of musicians like Little Walter and Big Joe Williams.



## Chicago Public Library

The library offers a plethora of [digital collections](#). The [Phillip David Sang Collection](#) contains a wide variety of materials documenting the struggles experienced by Africans and African American people through the slavery, the Middle Passage and the Civil Rights Movement. The [Chicago Renaissance Collection](#) documents the Black Chicago Renaissance which from the 1930s through the 1950s spawned many artists, writers, activists, business and community leaders. The [Remembering Harold Washington](#) collection celebrates Washington as the first African American elected to the position and his championing of neighborhood pride, giving Chicagoans a voice in city hall and prioritizing more balanced economic development between neighborhoods and downtown. Recorded programs and author talks are also available online through CPL's YouTube channel such as [Lift Every Voice: African American Poetry 250 Years of Struggle and Song](#) celebrates an anthology edited by Kevin Young, Poet and former Director of the Schomburg Center in New York. [Beyond Borders in the Archives: Marjorie Stewart Joyner](#) documents the life of Marjorie Stewart Joyner, a haircare entrepreneur, educator and activist who was a successor to Madame C. J. Walker.

**CHICAGO  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY**

## Chicago State University

There is a long history of political activism in Chicago and its Black residents have not shied away from opportunities to get involved. You can learn more through the [Illinois Legislative Black Caucus Collection](#) and the [Honorable R. Eugene and Alzata C. Pincham Collection](#) available online through Chicago State University.



**CHICAGO STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

# Digital Resources at BMRC Member Institutions

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Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

## Loyola University Chicago

There once was a small, private Catholic women's college in the Rogers Park/Edgewater neighborhood, Mundelein College. Inspired by their students, the Sisters who founded the institution in 1930 got involved in the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s. The exhibit, [Activist Mundelein: Civic Engagement at a 20th Century Women's College](#), is broken down into short oral history interviews and includes photographs that document young women's activism. Mundelein College affiliated with Loyola University Chicago in 1991 and its archives are held in the Women and Leadership Archives at the university.

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## The Newberry Library

A well-known movement which had a significant impact on the Black experience and culture was the Great Migration. A voluntary relocation of 6 million African Americans out of the Southern states to the Northeast, Midwest and West that occurred between 1916 and 1970. Most left smaller cities and rural towns for larger, more urban environments, primarily looking for better economic opportunities for themselves and their families. In the upcoming (January 28th) program, [The Great Migration, Reconsidered](#), three scholars will discuss aspects of this movement that are often overlooked by history books. On the Newberry's YouTube Channel, you will find previously recorded programs that explore and discuss a variety of topics. Their year-long series titled, [Chicago 1919: Confronting the Race Riots](#) covers how the riots impacted Chicago's social, political and cultural landscape.

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NORTHWESTERN  
UNIVERSITY

## Northwestern University

[They Demanded Courageously: The 1968 Northwestern Bursar's Office Takeover](#) is an online exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Bursar's Office Takeover. On April 22, 1968, members of Black student organizations, For Members Only (FMO) and Afro-American Student Union (AASU), presented a list of demands to the Northwestern University administration in response to discriminatory campus policies and practices and to heighten the awareness of Black student's experiences of racial insensitivity on campus. When the demands were not met, on May 3, 1968, more than 100 African American students occupied the Bursar's Office, Northwestern University's business office.

Learn about more African and American American collections by visiting Northwestern Libraries [exhibits](#) and [digital collections](#) pages.

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## Oak Park Public Library

Check out the [Anti-Racism page](#) with an extensive list of resources and virtual events. The first is Emancipation to Inauguration: Chicago's Black Experience. From Chicago's first non-indigenous citizen to the 44th President of the United States, African American history runs deep in Chicago and has touched all aspects of American life. Learn more about this incredible tale with musician/historian Clarence Goodman. There are many more virtual events listed here.

# Digital Resources at BMRC Member Institutions

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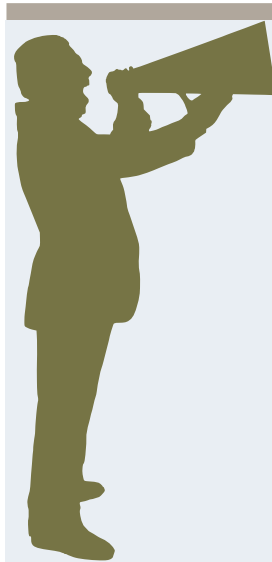
## Shorefront Legacy Center

The mission of Shorefront is to collect, preserve and educate people about Black history of Chicago's suburban North Shore. [Shorefront Voice](#), an oral history collection, provides insights into the lives and legacies of African Americans on the North Shore. A recent fall 2020 program in conjunction with Open House Chicago and other sponsors, titled Changing the Narrative: African Americans in Evanston is available on their [YouTube channel](#). It provides missing pieces of history about Evanston's growth economically and the contributions of its African American citizens.

**SHOREFRONT**  
Collect | Preserve | Educate

## University of Illinois - Chicago

Chicago, as one of the largest cities in the U.S. has a rich history tied to the industrialization period that strengthened the American economy. Though typically defined by two specified periods of time, manufacturing and technological innovation continued. One of the lesser-known contributors, was [Charles Harrison](#), an African American product designer who rose to the executive level at Sears, Roebuck and Company. The collection includes Harrison's design sketches, blueprints and product presentation boards. During an earlier time in American, many minorities were lacking skills on such a high level as Harrison and life was different. Large and small organizations have advocated on behalf of the disenfranchised. The National Urban League is one of the oldest African American social services, research and advocacy organizations. The [Chicago Urban League](#) was founded in 1916, only six years after the national organization came to be. With a direct tie to the University of Chicago's School of Sociology, the CUL was a leader in shaping public policy based upon community needs. The [Metropolitan Planning Council](#) (1934 – 2000), predecessor to the Chicago Housing Authority, was an inter-racial group formed to investigate current conditions and provide housing for low-income families and supported neighborhood rejuvenation projects. The 113 photographs included in this online exhibit will give the viewer a realistic glimpse of the challenging poor housing and home life conditions in early 20th century Chicago.



**CALLING ALL**

Member institutions  
Past and Current Fellows  
Past and Current Archie Motley Interns

**SEND US YOUR NEWS!!!**  
Email us at [bmrc@uchicago.edu](mailto:bmrc@uchicago.edu)



# Legacy Management Resource Portal

Tanya Calvin

Black archival collections are treasures, pieces of history. Many people have collections of extremely valuable items in their own home or at their organization and do not realize how significant they are. From photographs to letters to journals to recordings and more, these collections tell stories of the legacies of Black people all over Chicago who made important contributions to their family or larger community. To support efforts to preserve Black history in Chicago, the BMRC presented its new [Legacy Management Resource Portal](#) in August of 2020.

Our Community Engagement Archivist, Tanya Calvin, put together this resource for those seeking to archive their personal or organizational collections, or to donate their materials to a professional repository. The Legacy Management Resource Portal's [Guide to Managing Your Archives](#) outlines the process of storing, housing, processing, and providing access to archival collections, while the [Guide to Donating Archival Materials](#) explains choosing an institution, signing a deed of gift, and transferring collections to a repository. Both links can be found at the bottom of the Legacy Management Resource Portal landing page.

We hope that this resource will push forward our mission of preserving and sharing Black collections in Chicago by showing community members and organizations how they can ensure the longevity of their historical materials. As the title indicates, this resource strives to help preserve the many legacies of Chicago history that are stored in community homes and organizations. Please share this resource widely with your networks! We would like it to reach as far and wide as possible.



So far, the Legacy Management Resource Portal has been featured in the [Media Burn Archive Video Preservation Resources](#) page and is being adapted for a resource being created by the [Chicago Collections Consortium's Content Committee](#) to help potential donors of archival collections. We've also received great feedback about the Legacy Management Resource Portal from community members and archivists in Chicago and beyond.

Let us know if you have any questions or suggestions regarding the Legacy Management Resource Portal. We hope you enjoy it as much as we do!

[Access the Legacy Management Resource Portal!](#)





# Preserving A Father's Legacy: The Oscar Brown Jr. Archive Project

Maggie Brown and Africa Brown

*“It is most important to us to make OBJ’s works discoverable to a worldwide audience, and that means knowing for ourselves what the work is.”*

Maggie Brown and Africa Brown, “2Brown Sisters”

Oscar Brown, Jr. inherited a relentless commitment to truth and justice, and his words and wisdom still remain relevant today. He used his art as a vehicle for social change. He went on to impact the jazz music world, the theater world, the Black Arts Movement, and provided Chicago’s earliest arts-in-the-schools models. Yet he remains possibly one of the most undiscovered writers of the modern era. Tragically underused also, is the blueprint Oscar Brown, Jr. designed to transform despair into hope and promise: advancing the natural talents of his people through the arts. One of his strongest beliefs was that art should have Human-Improvement-Potential or HIP.

Born on the South Side of Chicago on October 10, 1926, Oscar Brown Jr. gained a love for performance at a young age, working as a radio actor in high school during the 1940s. He also gained a strong appreciation for English literature and used his talents as an actor, singer, songwriter, playwright and poet to become one of the most prolific creatives centering Black life and artistic expression.

Maggie Brown and Africa Brown, daughters of Oscar Brown, Jr., are known as “2Brown Sisters” and work as Co-Project Managers of the Oscar Brown, Jr. Archive Project (OBJ AP). The goals of the archives project are: to promote the publics’ interaction with the plays, writings, songs and other materials that make up the Oscar Brown Jr. archive, to develop programming and curriculum from the archive, and spread news about our activities into more diverse areas. Curated and stewarded by Maggie and Africa, the Oscar Brown Jr. Archive Project involves the following:

- Assessing and commencing archival storage and preservation of OBJ’s papers
- Developing, updating and digitizing musical scores and scripts of OBJ’s plays for future production
- Presenting and documenting staged readings of five OBJ plays
- Creating plans for an OBJ Archive performance exhibition



Oscar Brown Jr.

# Oscar Brown Jr. Archives Project

We intend to make Oscar Brown Jr.'s music and literary works more available to the public for educational and artistic activities. We are developing curriculum-based programming, reaching into the many edutainment subject matters that his work covers. We wish to position the works of Oscar Brown, Jr. to have greater incorporation when recognizing the significance of Chicago history, poetry and literature, the Black Arts movement, jazz, and early broadcasting.

Oscar Brown, Jr. made clear his desire to develop what he called: the "Oscar Brown Jr. Cybrary" (a cyberspace library) which would contain all of his work.

Only a small fraction of Oscar Brown Jr.'s poems, songs, musical plays and essays have been published. His vast, eclectic body of work, defies narrow definition. Having poured ourselves into the development and launching of the



Maggie Brown (l) and Africa Brown (r) in performance.

Through artist residencies, we have opportunities to consult and work in partnership with musicians, theater and recording technicians, librarians, archivists, digital arts consultants, and literary arts leaders. With technical support, equipment, performance space, and production time provided by the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, the Brown sisters are meeting their objectives to engage the public, upgrade the condition of the OBJ Archive and create resources for use in future productions. The OBJ Archives Project residency empowers the Brown sisters to revive their father's legacy and ensure its potential for publication and celebration by current and future generations.

Following a successful first round of residency in 2018 and 2019, Phase II of the OBJ AP began at the top of 2020. In this second phase, we focused on laying the foundations for both a physical and digital archive for OBJ's musical and literary works.

[OscarBrownJr.org](https://OscarBrownJr.org) website on October 10, 2020, we have advanced the OBJ AP into an interactive platform. The [OscarBrownJr.org](https://OscarBrownJr.org) website helps reveal the breadth of his writing and shares his philosophies with a world audience.

Beyond building the website and processing our father's archive, stewarding his legacy has involved challenges, but many more rewards. Securing the rights to do business with our father's work involved a decade-long struggle. In 2017, we finally gained control and established Bootblack Publishing Company, LLC which gives us license to use our father's work and create new artistic projects from his work. This brings up the importance of having written permission in place and access to materials of our family members.

One of the masterpieces in OBJ's stage plays is MAPLE LEAF, written about the great king of the

# Oscar Brown Jr. Archives Project

ragtime players - Scott Joplin. We wanted to create sheet music to establish the lyric our father interpreted for the play and turn MAPLE LEAF into a musical. However, to do so required us to first establish the vocalese with the music. Africa worked with pianist and arranger Miguel de la Cerna to create the score for MAPLE LEAF.

As part of our residency at the Logan Center for the Arts, we established and curated The Oscar Brown Junior Play Reading Series which included one work which had never been brought to the stage, CYBERSOUL, a piece Oscar Brown Jr. considered his “computer generated musical.” In order to present CYBERSOUL as a musical, we worked with musicians to posthumously collaborate with our father using his lyrics and coming up with melodies and arrangements.

## **NEXT STEPS FOR THE OBJ ARCHIVE PROJECT**

In our efforts to continue to activate and engage the public with the Oscar Brown Jr. Archives Project, we plan to schedule table readings of several of his plays. Those these readings will be private, recordings will be made available to the public in the near future.

In partnership with Logan Center for the Arts, 2Brown Sisters will produce a virtual show in tribute to OBJ. We will call on talented Chicagoans to help interpret Oscar’s music and poetry through a HIP lens. This variety show will be available to the public and is tentatively scheduled to premiere in May 2021.

We also plan to release a CD of a selection of songs from the musical plays which were staged in readings at the Logan Center during the first phase of the Oscar Brown, Jr. Archive Project.

The Oscar Brown, Jr. Archive Project ensures the potential for current and future generations to recognize and celebrate one of Chicago’s greatest musical and literary artists.

Support from the Revada Foundation has significantly advanced our progress in creating a permanent public record of OBJ’s legacy. We also wish to thank the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts and Rebuild Foundation for their support of the Oscar Brown Jr. Archives Project.

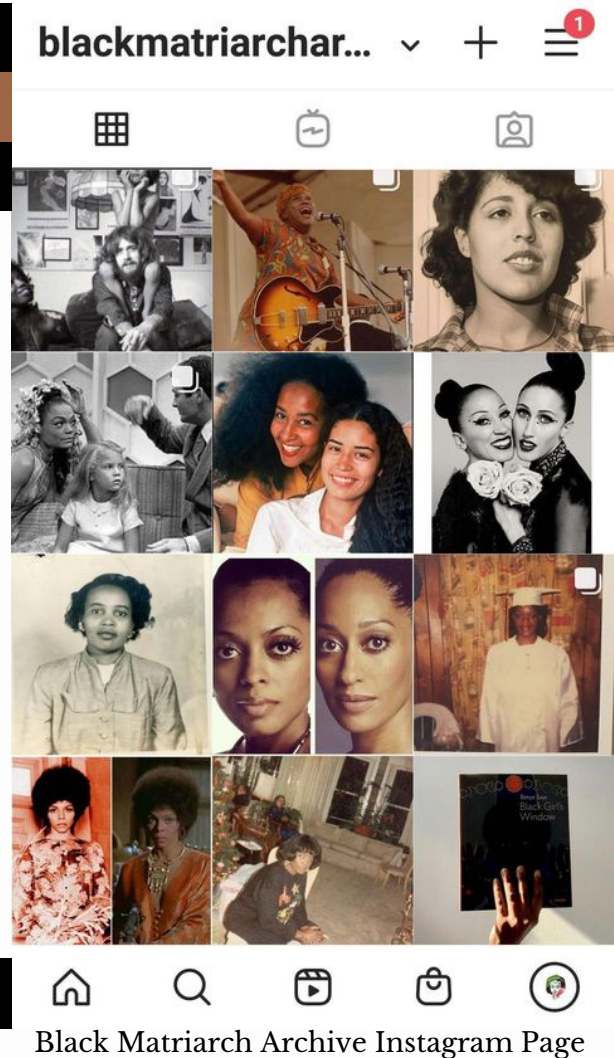


Maggie Brown (l) and Africa Brown (r) , 2Brown Sisters

# Black Matriarch Archive

## An interview with its founder, Alkebuluan Merriweather

Questions by Tanya Calvin



Black Matriarch Archive Instagram Page

### Who is Alkebuluan Merriweather and what is the Black Matriarch Archive (BMA)?

Alkebuluan Merriweather is a Chicago based artist, zine maker, budding archivist, and museum enthusiast. In May of 2019, she received her bachelor's degree in Art History from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Currently, she is a graduate student within the Museum and Exhibition Studies program at UIC. Her practice often derives from personal narratives and as a Black woman, she views art as a form of self-care and therapy. Furthermore, she uses photographic imagery to document her self-expression as it relates to the built environment of the South Side of Chicago, portraiture, and black disability. Alkebuluan is also the founder of **Black Matriarch Archive**. Black Matriarch Archive seeks to create an ongoing record commemorating the Black women in our lives who were crucial in our upbringing.

The goal here is to encourage members of the African diaspora to submit images and video documentation of black elders, whether they may be grandmothers, great-aunts, godmothers, or caregivers. We seek to create an ongoing archive commemorating the black women in our lives who were crucial in our upbringing.

Black Matriarch Archive is not just limited to cisgender Black people. We encourage everyone to submit imagery of the black women in their lives, whether they are your drag mother, godmother, great-aunt, caregiver, or non blood related relatives. BMA is intended to be a space for all Black people, including the LGBTQIA community and non gender conforming folks.

### Why did you start the BMA?

I launched Black Matriarch Archive as an archival Instagram account on September 20, 2020. Black Matriarch Archive is a way for me to honor my now deceased grandmother Mae Merriweather and all of the Black women who have cheered me on since childhood. As I continue my journey within higher education, I wanted to take a moment and thank the Black women who have done nothing but support me. The women who have told me: "Baby, I'm proud of you", "Girl, you is so smart", "You going places", "You got a pretty face and big brain."

# Black Matriarch Archive

## How do you hope the BMA will impact viewers and researchers?

I hope Black Matriarch Archive will encourage people to view and follow the archive. I sincerely hope it will take a few moments and read through some of the amazing submissions that have been posted to the archival page. Often within society Black women are overlooked for the accomplishments and impacts. I hope BMA will start to change that narrative.

## What are your future plans and intentions with the BMA?

I have many plans for the future of the Black Matriarch Archive. I plan on releasing zine editions compiled with submissions. My goal is to provide a free copy online via online in collaboration with the upcoming website titled Black Artist Network founded by graduate student Ayrika Hall. Post Covid-19, I would love the opportunity to curate an exhibition centered around the archive. It would be an immense pleasure to exhibit the narratives around the archive outside the constraints of social media.

Right now I'm trying to send the upcoming zines to imprisoned men and women in Chicago. However this process has proven to be difficult with waiting for responses from organizations and the Chair committee from various prisons. I haven't given up hope yet, if anything I'll start sending individual imprisoned people who have assisted with the narrative and documentation of the Illinois Deaths in Custody project.

## How is the BMA pushing the boundaries of the archival field?

In my opinion, I believe Black Matriarch Archive is encouraging this idea of curating a digital history. I enjoy following archival accounts such as the Black Joy Archive by Zoe Pulley Black Archives. Co, Black Lesbian Archives, Latinx Disapora Archives, Quinceanera archives, and girl\_gone\_golden. All of the archival accounts I have mentioned are run by everyday people. Many of them are artists or researchers who are pushing the boundaries of what a digital archivist can be in this day of age.



Alkebulan Merriweather

blackmatriarchar... ▾ + ☰<sup>1</sup>



**82** Posts  
**1,107** Followers  
**1,075** Following

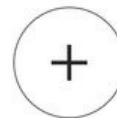
**Black Matriarch Archive**

Archive  
Curated by Alkebulan Merriweather @alkebulanm  
An archive dedicated to cele... more

Edit Profile



Highlights



New



Contribute to the BMA archive on Instagram.

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