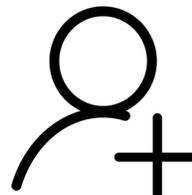




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**ARCHIVISTS  
AND ARCHIVES  
OF COLOR**

**NEWS**



Group photo in front of BCC: LtoR: BCC dedication on September 27, 1970. Roy Snell (President BSO), Mrs. Parks, Norman Thomas (1st Manager of BCC), W. Robert Parks (ISU President), Amelia Parker, Dean William Bell (Associate Dean of Students), Mrs. Bell. University Photographs, box 496.

## Letter from the Senior Chair

Dear AAC community,

It is hard to deny the impact that 2020 had on our work as archivists and our personal lives. COVID-19 closed many of our buildings, sent many of us home to work, crashed the economy, affected the job market, and put jobs at risk. It looks like 2021 will be much of the same. Those of us in section leadership understand

how this situation has put a lot of extra stress and an element of uncertainty about the future in the workplace. We hope that participation in our section will help you feel supported, seen, and heard. Please reach out if you have any suggestions as to other ways in which we can do that.

The calls for justice after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery caused many companies, institutions, and professions including our own to reflect inward and make a commitment for change. This has put a spotlight on our section and members. Leadership has received many requests for collaboration, help, support, and or advice in the creation of new policies, procedures, projects, and events that help others complete their goals. We have counseled and discussed all requests and have chosen a few exciting opportunities, soon to be announced, that we think will uplift and support our members and help in our work as archivists, while promoting collaboration between the Society of American Archivists sections.

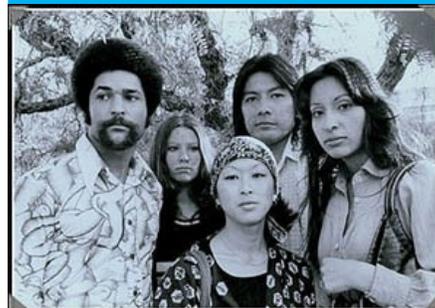
I have learned a lot in my short time in the role chair since September. I highly recommend running for a position in leadership. It is a great opportunity to learn more about the section and build relationships in the profession. I am extremely grateful for our current leadership, Tracy Drake, Haian Abdirahman, Brittany Newberry, Zakiya Collier, Tamara Rayan, and Bernadette Birzer who have provided excellent council, passion for the work, and have helped me keep our goals in mind.

Though we still do not know what the conference will look like this year; we look forward to seeing you all in our section meeting. We will keep you informed as we get more information. We also have been asked to participate in the new SAA mentorship program to be rolled out this year. If you have the capacity and are interested, please sign up through the portal page when it launches. We will make announcements when that happens.

Sincerely,

Tarienne Mitchell

## About AAC



The Changing Face of California State University, circa 1970s. Public Affairs Photo Collection. Courtesy of the California State University Archive.

**The Archivists and Archives of Color Section (AAC) is an interest group within the Society of American Archivists. SAA is the oldest and largest archival association in North America, serving the educational and informational needs of more than 5,500 individuals and institutional members. The AAC Section helps to identify concerns and promote the needs of archivists and archives of color.**

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# Staff Updates From Fall 2020

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## Nix Mendy: Julia C. Blixrud Scholarship Winner Selected for 2020

Amy Yeager, Communications Manager

amy@arl.org



Photo of Nix Mendy, Julia C. Blixrud Scholarship Winner Selected for 2020

September 24, 2020: The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has awarded Nix Mendy the Julia C. Blixrud Scholarship to attend the ARL Fall Forum 2020. The scholarship was established in 2015 to honor the memory and extend the legacy of longtime ARL staff member, Julia C. Blixrud. It is supported by generous donations to the Julia C. Blixrud Memorial Fund. This year's Blixrud Scholarship recipient, Nix Mendy, is a library associate at Tulane University, where they arrange a large literary collection, build reparative description projects alongside the collection management team, and enhance accessibility to five distinctive units. They also independently lead oral history projects regarding LGBTQ+ identity and migration within the African diaspora. They hope to challenge misrepresentation and foster greater self-determination in the historical record by prioritizing the stories and expertise of marginalized communities. Mendy earned an MS in library and information science from Simmons University in summer 2020 and is a 2019–2020 American Library Association Spectrum

Scholar. The theme of the ARL Fall Forum 2020, which will be held online on Thursday, October 8, is "Leading Libraries toward Anti-racism in a Changing World." As part of the scholarship, Mendy will tweet from the forum and write an overview of the event.

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## ARL Fall Forum 2020 Explores Leading Libraries Toward Anti-racism In A Changing World

Nix Mendy, Library Associate at Tulane University Special Collections

mendy@tulane.edu

November 19, 2020: As the 2020 recipient of the Julia C. Blixrud scholarship, I attended the *ARL Fall Forum*, titled "Leading Libraries toward Anti-racism in a Changing World," which remains a clear highlight of this unpredictable year. Though the digital format (set as a webinar over a traditional Zoom call) did not offer me the same chance to casually mingle with or privately message Julia C. Blixrud's family and friends to

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(continued from page 3) personally learn more about her lasting legacy, receiving congratulation emails and social media responses was warming. If the Fall Forum is redone virtually, I would suggest a reflection space on Blixrud, similar to the happy hour breakout rooms, where those stories could continue to enrich the overall experience. That said, to all that made the scholarship possible, including Blixrud herself, thank you! I am honored to be seen as reflection of her dynamic spirit and thrilled that her vision and investment in our profession lives on in an impactful, communal way.

Safiya Umoja Noble, this year's Julia C. Blixrud Memorial Lecturer, opened the Forum with her lecture, "New Paradigms of Justice: How Librarians Can Respond to the Knowledge Crisis," where she argued that the library science profession cannot fully cede the distribution of knowledge to big tech companies. Those with the most technical expertise seek influence and often replicate the same social inequalities virtually that exist in our physical world: they misrepresent and content-police communities that are already underrepresented and over-surveilled; they "balance" marketing and engagement (which are financially tied) with ethical review, so the former wins out more; and their algorithms can be hacked and manipulated, instead of consistently providing accuracy. Instead of spending so much time replicating their tactics, library professionals should consider how we can define the culture away from misinformation. We can help our patrons think critically about the sources, intention, and context driving any creation. Universities and the libraries within them have a responsibility in rebuilding the public good—namely the interests of validity, democratic access, and user privacy—and Noble recommended some clear steps:

- Reject neutrality and acknowledge the consequences instead. Assuming neutrality means masking why and how choices have been made, and any harm stemming from those decisions. Acknowledge and assess your stance instead.
- Educate yourself [and others!] on social issues around race, gender, and economic class. Living out our values should begin in our own field. Librarians of color leaving the profession is not a pipeline problem, but instead points to a clear lack of opportunity: they are underpaid, tokenized by often-defunded diversity positions, and hit a "cement ceiling" in professional growth through temporary work and mismanagement. We cannot point fingers at other industries without analyzing how we imitate their damages.
- Address the above through *required* courses in iSchools. We should not only embed critical theory and ethical consideration into the beginning of the professional pipeline, but should also continue to build on these frameworks throughout our careers.
- Educate yourself [and others!] on the harms of Big Tech. Demand repair and restoration, especially in holding them accountable for civil and human rights violations.

Inherent in Noble's call to action was a commitment to and *beyond* self-awareness. Big tech companies show us again and again that having and harvesting the data is not enough. You must have the fortitude to use the details to move against harmful, unethical trends.

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(continued from page 4) Noble's lecture really set the stage for the lively discussion in the "Fresh Perspectives on Making an Impact and Taking Action" panel, moderated by the dynamic Tracie Hall, executive director of the American Library Association.

Hall noted that because "institutions are now judged as much for their action as their inaction," tokenization and co-optimization of ground-level movement work may be the first impulse. Those in power are concerned with preserving their reputation and legacy in an immediate sense, which can create tension against the long game of building a sustainable, inclusive culture. Yet, equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives cannot exist just to protect the institution and hoard power; these efforts should share and *distribute* power throughout the ranks. When panelists were called to define their pre-work, i.e. the vision, planning, and foresight, Patrick Sims and Patricia Hswe focused on the stories of the overlooked. Those who have been sidelined have a unique and necessary point of view on the challenges and pitfalls of the current system. Issues as disparate as assessing curriculum and equitable grant funding still had one core need: learning their desired audiences more deeply. Tara Robertson also offered that creating professional engagement programs where field experts consistently come in to discuss pressing topics (such as diversity and power dynamics) also generated space for structured discussions with workers of all levels. This kind of move can shift power by fostering an environment of learning for everyone. Integrating and engaging the feedback remains a crucial step for transparency and accountability. The panelists suggested matching the needs and urgency of those who offered their observations with overarching principles that can be funded and resourced. Creating lasting values that match the drive of your community will go further than loose actions taken just to pacify the moment. We were then encouraged to go the extra mile to make up for missed time; when "we're good at working right up to the edge, but not over it", we never actually break the barrier.

The quieting shift from many voices to Minelle Mahtani's singular one in "Risk, Relation, Revolution, Repair: Refusing Closure, Accepting Ambivalence" was a great ending note. One key point from her reflections on her personal and professional challenges as the radio host of "Sense of Place" was her challenge to one of the most traditional questions in interviews: "What do you mean by that?" While often seen as a way to clarify the intention of a statement, the inquiry can become an extractive tool that "drags information out" and forces the interviewee to reanalyze and decide how to rephrase on the spot. Being expected to satisfy the host, instead of offering and relying on their own expertise, erodes trust and causes shame over not getting a story or issue "right." An interviewer should be careful to steer away from questions that change the dynamic from open and self-reflective to closed off and self-critical. Similarly, information professionals should be careful in assuming that *our* confusion or lack of understanding on a topic is *universal*, and instead interrogate why we may not have the same experiences, context, or resources to better bridge gaps. I also appreciated Mahtani mentioning that the interviewees' stories came from "familiar sites of pain, shame, and trauma"; while she valued the work, she also had to make peace with releasing the stories to the world *emotionally*. Anti-racist work requires considerable emotional labor, especially the necessary humility to admit and assess how and

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(continued from page 5) harm, and the willingness to pivot in the future. We have been called to move from intention to action to policy and back again, keeping in mind that each stage informs and holds the others accountable. Policy that does not match our values; actions without transparency, documentation, and/or analysis; and intention without follow-through break the cycle down to just lip service.

After ARL took up the charge on this timely topic, the library community represented within the Fall Forum was not only responsive, but also energized in reflecting on the day during the happy hour, which was a clear surprise after nearly four hours of lectures, panel discussions, and papers!

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After ARL took up the charge on this timely topic, the library community represented within the Fall Forum was not only responsive, but also energized in reflecting on the day during the happy hour, which was a clear surprise after nearly four hours of lectures, panel discussions, and papers! To ensure that anti-racism stays a commitment "despite pandemic, despite budget cuts, and despite our own fatigue" (per Gwen Bird in the final wrap-up), we need more spaces like these to share ideas and bolster each other in the work ahead. It's clear that reflecting the diverse communities around us, while also addressing/repairing our role in advancing/upholding certain standards and forms of knowledge over others, will take all of us. Meeting new ideas, co-conspirators, and communal effort was validating and encouraging. Thank you again ARL, and keep the momentum!

See also tweets shared with the [#ARLforum20](#) hashtag.

*Nix Mendy is the recipient of the 2020 Julia C. Blixrud Scholarship. They are a 2019–2020 Spectrum Scholar and library associate at Tulane University where they arrange a large literary collection, build reparative description projects alongside the collection management team, and enhance accessibility to five distinctive units.*

# Announcements

**Iowa State University Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) will be hosting an exhibit in recognition of the George A. Jackson Black Cultural Center's 50th Anniversary**

*Greg Bailey, University Archivist,*  
gtbailey@iastate.edu

A student protest, following the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., was the impetus that established what is now the George A. Jackson Black Cultural Center (BCC) at Iowa State University (ISU). On April 4, 1968, Black students gathered to form the "Afro-American Students of Iowa State". Two days later on the evening of April 6, approximately 50 demonstrators from this group gathered at the Memorial Union and toasted to "Black unity on campus," then tossed away their cups, overturned the tables and chairs and left. Within weeks of this action, the students had laid out their purpose in a constitution and formed the Black Student Organization (BSO). The BSO became the leading voice on campus over the next several years in a push for equitable treatment of Black students, the hiring of Black faculty and staff, an African Studies program, the promotion of cultural awareness on campus, and a center where Black students could share life experiences providing support in a predominantly white institute. The Center faced a struggle for funding and recognition from the start. ISU President W. Robert Parks stated that the university couldn't provide money for the funding of the organization or purchasing of property to house the Center.

He did urge student, faculty, staff, alumni, and the general public to help raise funds. Throughout the 1969-70 school year support continued to grow on campus in support of a Cultural Center, with the Government of the Student Body passing a resolution in support, and the ongoing fundraising efforts. By late 1969 the \$30,000 was raised and a house at 517 Welch Avenue was purchased to be the home of the Black Cultural Center (BCC). The BCC was dedicated on September 27, 1970.

The BCC operated as a stand-alone, private nonprofit with no official ties to Iowa State University, but often worked with the BSO to sponsor programming such as Black History Week/Month events, MLK Day events, along with other programs throughout the school year highlighting Black and *(continued on next page)*



Rapline was one of many publications created by the BCC. It often contained poems, short stories, fashion, and history of Black Americans, along with announcements and calendar of events. Black Cultural Center Records, RS 7/5/4 Box 2 Folder 9.

*(continued from page 3)* African culture. Since its inception, the Center had difficulty with funding, having relied on donations for students, faculty, staff, alumni and the community to keep its doors open. By 1995 the facility needed \$40,000 in repairs and an agreement was reached between ISU and the BCC. The BCC would finally be formally recognized as an organization affiliated with the University, programming would be designed to support both, and the ISU Foundation would assist in fundraising efforts.

On May 20, 2017, the Black Cultural Center was named in honor of Dr. George A. Jackson. Dr. Jackson had served ISU for 31 years, from his arrival in 1978 as the first director of the newly named Office of Minority Student Affairs, Associate Dean of the Graduate College, Director of the BCC, and Special Assistant to the Provost. During his time at ISU, Dr. Jackson championed the recruitment of underrepresented students and faculty, and initiated a number of academic and social programs to support underrepresented student life.

The exhibit will open in February of 2021 and contain correspondence, photos, event programs, and newsletters showing the work of the BSO to gain recognition and establish the George A. Jackson Black Cultural Center.

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## ***Your New 2020-2021 AAC Steering Committee***

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**Tarienne Mitchell**  
*Senior Chair*



**Tracy Drake**  
*Vice Chair*



**Tamara Rayan**  
*Steering Committee  
Member*



**Haian Abdirahman**  
*Steering Committee  
Member*



**Brittany Newberry**  
*Steering Committee Member  
and Social Media Coordinator*



**Zakiya Collier**  
*Web Liaison*



**Bernadette Birzer**  
*Newsletter Editor*