

Poetry as Activism Edited Collection Roundtable: Engaging Archival Materials & Born-Digital Publishing

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Program Description: The Poetry as Activism edited collection is an open-access, born-digital resource published by the University of Delaware Press. The collection aims to connect the widest possible audiences to the materials from UD's Special Collections digitized for the Poetry as Activism Project. This roundtable explores the process of creating a born-digital scholarly collection centering archival materials that most contributors to the collection have never seen in person.

Session Description:

Launched in 2023, the University of Delaware's Mellon-funded Poetry as Activism Project draws on the archival collections of twentieth-century American poets, with a focus on poets from historically marginalized groups, to engage with archival materials in new ways. This project examines the role that activism has played in poets' lives and art over time while also exploring the notion of poetry as activism more generally. The Poetry as Activism Project focuses on activist movements for racial justice, queer liberation, anti-war action, and criminal justice reform, to name a few. To accomplish the goal of engaging with archival materials in new ways, the Poetry as Activism project prioritized three initiatives: (1) the thematic digitization of materials from UD's Special Collections (2) the recruitment of a Poet-in-Residence who draws inspiration from the collections to develop programming related to the project theme and (3) the publication of the born-digital edited collection by the University of Delaware Press.

The roundtable will serve as an opportunity for contributors to the Poetry as Activism Project's edited collection to reflect on the process of contributing to an open-access scholarly collection that centers archival materials that most contributors have never seen in person. How do scholars approach the work of engaging with archival materials accessed solely by digital means in order to create a born-digital resource about a physical archival collection? What are the challenges, benefits, and particularities of creating a born-digital publication that is also invested in the materiality of archival objects? A central tenet of the Poetry as Activism Project is that digitization is a jumping off point for engaging archival collections. The open-access, born-digital edited collection frames archival materials in literary and activist contexts and offers companion resources including a bibliography and transcriptions to further complement the digitized materials. Furthermore, the scholarly collection engages in multi-media scholarship by including a podcast that offers each contributing scholar the opportunity to tell the story of their essay in conversation with staff from UD's Special Collections who regularly engage with the archival materials in question. In all of these ways, the Poetry as Activism collection seeks to make the work of archival stewardship and scholarly production legible, visible, and accessible. Roundtable participants will speak to the genesis of the Poetry as Activism Project, the process of creating the born-digital edited collection on the Manifold platform, and how scholars highlighted specific Special Collections materials in their essays.

This roundtable relates to the conference theme of "Visibility" in that the goal of the Poetry as Activism Project is to make highly relevant Special Collections materials more visible, accessible, and legible to the widest possible audience. For example, collections highlighted in the project include materials by Ishmael Reed (including his materials related to his publishing ventures and the Before Columbus Foundation), Amiri Baraka, Dudley Randall's Broadside Press, Diane di Prima, Tia Blassingame, Richard McCann, and more. By commissioning a podcast that explores Special Collections practices, the Project team sought to highlight and make visible the labor involved in organizing, preserving, and engaging materials as well as contextualizing them within scholarly and activist traditions. By publishing the edited collection

on Manifold, the Project team further demonstrates that making materials visible is but one part of the effort to engage wider audiences, as the Manifold platform encourages active participation from audiences in the form of annotation and reading group tools.

Each of the five participants in the seventy-five minute roundtable session will receive five-ten minutes to reflect on their contribution to the edited collection. This will leave ample time to take questions from the audience. The participants include the collection's editor, one essay contributor, the creator and host of the collection's podcast, as well as the Project Manager of the Poetry as Activism Project and the Director of the University of Delaware Press. By including a range of perspectives, the roundtable will allow for a rich discussion of multiple stages of the editorial and publication process, and multiple perspectives on the challenges and affordances of open-access digital publishing. Roundtable participants hope to engage questions regarding the content of the edited collection about twentieth-century American poet-activist traditions, specifically regarding movements for racial justice, queer liberation, and legacies of the Black Arts Movement. We also plan to engage questions about the process of creating the edited collection using digitized materials and remote contributor participation, as well as navigating born-digital scholarly publishing.