CURATING MEMORY: THE AFRICAN DIASPORA THROUGH GLOBAL NARRATIVES AND DIGITAL FRAMEWORKS

JAKYAH HAYES AND DR. AMY KOWAL
TYLER CENTER FOR GLOBAL STUDIES UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AWARD

FSU | FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Tyler Center for Global Studies

BACKGROUND

Museums in the United States are facing increasing political pressure to limit or reframe African American history amid rising hate crimes and political polarization. Such incidents reflect broader debates over whose histories are deemed legitimate and how stories are shared within institutions. This project investigates how existing representations in Western frameworks of African diasporic preservation can be enriched through more community-centered Global South frameworks. Focusing on Brazil, ***Curating Memory*** examines how African diasporic histories are curated and protected internationally, and how digital frameworks including Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence(AI) can broaden the observation, accessibility, and interpretation of cultural memory.

WHY BRAZIL?

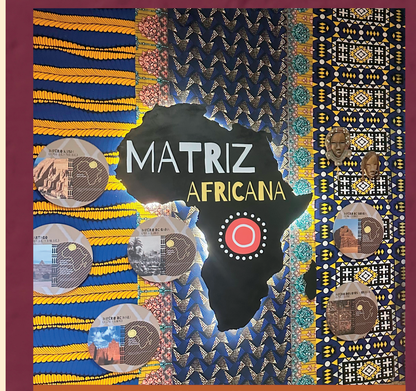
Brazil holds the largest African diaspora outside of Africa. While persistent systemic racism in both regions attempts cultural and racial erasure—in Brazil, often masked behind a **non-linear doctrine of "racial mixing"**— Negra or Afro-Brazilian communities have sustained an unbroken thread of cultural memory across generations that Western frameworks systematically severed.

- **Brazil: Preservation** is an active, community-embedded lived experience where African heritage survives through cultural practice and everyday spatial connection.
- **United States: Memory** preservation fights an institutional landscape that actively resists, minimizes, or erases African American history.

METHODOLOGY

1. **Preliminary Findings:**
   - Compared Western and Latin American museum frameworks for representing the African diaspora
   - Identified limited research on AI and digital technology in African diasporic museum studies.
2. **Project Development & Research Framework:**
   - Developed the **Tyler Fellows** research proposal.
   - Created a GLAM-based framework focused on:
     - Artifact preservation
     - Institutional funding
     - Multilingual and translated information
     - Digital technology and accessibility
3. **Digital Documentation & Comparative Analysis:**
   - Used Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses for hands-free field documentation.
   - Compared museum observations, exhibits, language, technology, and accessibility.
4. **Synthesis & Application:**
   - Conducted approximately one month of fieldwork in **Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, Bahia.**
   - Synthesized findings into a video highlighting African diasporic cultural memory and representation.

OBSERVATIONS & FINDINGS



Matriz Africana (African Matrix) — Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos (IPN).

This exhibit centers Africa as the root of cultural identity, heritage, and memory, highlighting the African kingdoms and histories that shaped the African diaspora.



Sankofa Mural - Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR)

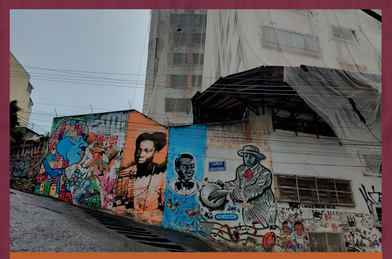
Meta Ray-Ban glasses enabled hands-free, first-person documentation, capturing authentic interactions with museum exhibits and preserving my lived experience of the space.

Community as an Archive

Western frameworks traditionally isolate history from daily life. My in-person field research in Brazil revealed preservation exists within everyday community spaces, neighborhoods, and living cultural practices.



Valonga Wharf (UNESCO Site) memorial sculpture



Pequena África (Little Africa) in Rio de Janero



Cultural Afro Brazilian Museum- Museu Afro-Brasileiro (MAFRO)

The exhibit uses projections, sensory elements, and sculptures to bring Afro-Brazilian histories to life, fostering collective memory through immersive, community-centered spaces.



Immersive VR Engagement with Yoruba Spatial Traditions

This exhibition immerses visitors in Yoruba traditions through the spatial sequence of an initiation ritual. Film and VR offer ways to document and share Latin American living archives globally.



Library inside MUHCAB (Museum of Afro-Brazilian Culture and History in Rio)



Exhibition wall panel- ("Uma História da Arte Brasileira") Museum of Modern Art (MAM Rio).

The panel demonstrates physical museum accessibility by providing side-by-side English translations alongside Portuguese text.





Statue of Zumbi dos Palmares is an important monument located in the Historic Center of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

DISCUSSION

ANALYSIS

Bridging the gap between a localized museum space and a broader audience, allowing research grounded in physical space to reach **beyond** traditional academic boundaries:

- **Location & Spatial Framing:** In-person documentation captured exhibit flow, atmosphere, and authentic interactions, creating a hands-free, first-person archive of lived eperience.
- **Film, VR & Afro-Futurism:** Immersive technologies can document and share living heritage globally, inspiring future possibilities for African diasporic identity and Afro-futurism.
- **The Central Theme of Sankofa:** The Ghanaian concept of Sankofa—"to reach back and retrieve that which is forgotten"—emerged as a vital organizing thread. The films and exhibits explicitly linked historical memory with contemporary empowerment.

FUTURE DIRECTION

- **Bridge Diasporic Frameworks:** Connect African American preservation with Afro-Brazilian models, treating neighborhoods, churches, and digital spaces as living archives.
- **Community Film & Preservation:** Create a short film documenting fieldwork; share it in community spaces to promote digital preservation of historic Black neighborhoods and inspire creative documentation of Black history and future possibilities.
- **Future Scholarship:** Collaborate with researchers to publish findings and expand scholarship on digital preservation, Black communities, and place-based storytelling.
- **Continue the Research:** Apply for the Tyler Fellow Grant to explore digital frameworks, AI integration, and immersive film techniques for global African diaspora preservation.

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