



The grant will provide new support for UCLA students learning to develop and preserve archival collections for other researchers and the public. Photo: Kelly Lyte Hernández.

"The Age of Mass Incarceration," UCLA's archive to collect police violence in Los Angeles

Thanks to a \$3.65 million grant, UCLA will create one of the nation's most diverse collections of institutionalized abuse. And it will challenge official statistics.



By Beatriz García

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Last year, struggles for racial and social justice in the United States came to a head, even if the trigger for the **BLM-led** rebellion was a tragic one.

To ensure the past is never repeated and to equip researchers for future generations, UCLA has embarked on an ambitious project to create one of the most diverse archives of **police violence** in the country.

The **Archiving the Age of Mass Incarceration** initiative will digitize and preserve both the oral histories of victims of the violence and all kinds of documents that bear witness to it, from bail receipts to police records to posters used at protests.

The intention, says the university, is that, in addition to serving as a subject of study, it will be a counterpoint to official police and criminal justice statistics.

The project is based on UCLA's award-winning Million Dollar Hoods research, led by Bunch Center Director Kelly Lyte Hernandez.

Million Dollar Hoods began in 2016 by mapping the human and fiscal cost of mass incarceration in Los Angeles.

It also relies on the collaboration of the institution's **ethnic studies centers** — the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, the Center for Asian American Studies, the Center for American Indian Studies, and the Chicano Studies Research Center — which were established in 1969 with a commitment to support all research that promotes social and racial justice.

A million-dollar grant

It's a very ambitious challenge made possible in part by a \$3.65 million grant from the Mellon Foundation that has made it the first major institution to collaborate with UCLA's four ethnic studies centers — a Ford Foundation grant supported their creation in 1969.

"This vital and significant effort will expand our knowledge of mass incarceration, connect the academy and impacted communities in a deep and meaningful effort to tell a more detailed and comprehensive story about policing and race, and make the findings and insights gleaned from these crucial archival materials widely accessible to the public," said Elizabeth Alexander, president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

"Our country has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and the Archiving the Age of Mass Incarceration project will ensure both that oral histories and ephemera provide alternative narratives to police crime statistics, and that materials from our deeply unjust criminal legal system are studied and preserved,"

she continued.

A shared archive

UCLA scholars hope that when the digital platform is built, it will serve as a huge knowledge exchanger among ethnic studies centers. They are laying the groundwork.

One of the first initiatives will be to digitally preserve Los Angeles Police Department records, to which Hernandez had access, documenting topics ranging from immigration control to the war on drugs.

Beyond that, truly groundbreaking is the diversity of the archive, which will include various communities of color and shed a clearer light on how Los Angeles has become the epicenter of mass incarceration in the United States with biracial people and people of color at the eye of the hurricane of malpractice.

For example, the often erroneous registration of Native American people by police, who are misidentified that often results in the effect of mass incarceration on them being underestimated.

"The creation of this archive will not only help us recognize and correct this reality, but will also highlight the survival of indigenous peoples and acknowledge their presence and contribution to our communities," concluded Shannon Speed, the director of UCLA's Center for American Indian Studies.

Undoubtedly, this is a major step toward a necessary reckoning with the past that will improve our future. That means everyone's future.