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## UCLA Mellon Grant to Establish Archive About Mass Incarceration

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UCLA scholars are launching an initiative to collect, digitize and preserve an archive of data, testimonies, artifacts and police files for the next generation of research on racial and social justice, the university announced Thursday.

“Archiving the Age of Mass Incarceration” is being funded in part by a three-year, \$3.65 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and it will bring together expertise from the UCLA Institute of American Cultures’ four ethnic studies centers and their established connections to local advocacy groups.

“This vital and significant effort will expand our knowledge of mass incarceration, connect the academy and impacted communities in a deep, meaningful effort to tell a more detailed and complete story about policing and race, and make the findings and insights gleaned from these crucial archival materials broadly accessible to the public,” said Elizabeth Alexander, the foundation’s president.

“Our country has the highest incarceration rate in the world,” she said, and the archive “will ensure both that oral histories and ephemera provide alternative narratives to police statistics about crime, and that the materials of our profoundly unjust criminal legal system are studied and preserved.”

The project builds off of the work of the UCLA-based Million Dollar Hoods research project, a community-driven initiative that began in 2016 to map the fiscal and human cost of mass incarceration in Los Angeles.

The collection will include new oral histories documenting Angelenos’ experiences with law enforcement and incarceration, as well as stories of survival and protest practices. Other materials collected from the community, such as bail bond receipts, mix tapes and poster art, will provide meaningful counterpoints to official police and criminal justice statistics.

UCLA’s ethnic studies centers — the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, the Asian American Studies Center, American Indian Studies Center and the Chicano Studies Research Center — were established in 1969. With a shared mandate to support research that advances social and racial justice, the centers have a combined total of more than 250 affiliated faculty members, one of the nation’s largest concentrations of racial justice scholars.

The collaboration “will preserve the documentary evidence of mass incarceration and its impact on people’s lives in Los Angeles while building a new digital bedrock for racial justice scholars and scholarship at UCLA,” said Kelly Lytle Hernandez, director of the Bunche Center and a 2019 recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship, commonly referred to as the “genius grant.”

Led by Lytle Hernandez, Million Dollar Hoods has advanced efforts to shrink public funding for policing and jails in Los Angeles and to redistribute those resources to community-based systems of care.

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Reaching across communities of color, one of the project's first initiatives will digitally preserve a cache of Los Angeles Police Department records documenting a wide range of issues, ranging from on-the-ground enforcement of the war on drugs to entanglements between the police and immigration control.

Lytle Hernandez won access to those records in a legal settlement with the LAPD and was able to bring the records to UCLA with legal guidance from UCLA Library, which also provided access to a secure, climate-controlled location for the files.

“Without the UCLA Library, we would not have those records,” Lytle Hernandez said.

A key element of the overall project will be that it encompasses research across several communities of color. That breadth will be critical to improving public awareness of Los Angeles as the epicenter of mass incarceration in the U.S., and it will highlight various ways in which biracial and people of color are disproportionately affected, according to Lytle Hernandez.

Million Dollar Hoods, the ethnic studies centers and experts from the community who regularly work with the public will train UCLA students to work with digital archives.

“Students will get hands-on experience in how both institutional and community-based archival collections are preserved, described and made accessible to the public,” said Chon Noriega, director of the Chicano Studies Research Center. “They'll be on the front lines of helping make this history visible.”

*UCLA MELLON GRANT TO ESTABLISH ARCHIVE ABOUT MASS INCARCERATION was last modified: January 28th, 2021 by Contributing Editor*