Black Church Studies Web Archive Project at Princeton Theological Seminary

Archive-It SAA 2016 pre-conference workshop August 2, 2016

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SLIDE 1:

The Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine began crawling the PTS website in 1998. In 2012, the Seminary Board of Trustees and Seminary Librarian asked the Digital Initiatives unit to address preservation of web resources and social media.

SLIDE 2:

The DI team evaluated and selected Archive-It that December.

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Rather than rely on Archive-It, the team wanted to develop its own user interface and took inspiration from Columbia University’s Human Rights Web Archive user interface.

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The newly redesigned presentation complements our Theological Commons design, with

SLIDE 5:

responsive functionality added using the Bootstrap framework. Pinterest style cards displaying the different collections are built using a JavaScript library called Masonry.

SLIDE 6:

Many sites mirror physical collections, such as faculty sites and Princeton church sites. Others relate to PTS history, mission, and people. The web archive also is evolving toward more of a preservation approach in addition to collecting web content. I think we’re adopting many of Nicholas Taylor’s points. We are looking for hidden online resources that document underrepresented communities and preserve a less official historical narrative of PTS.

SLIDE 7:

The seminary board has been especially interested in capturing social media. We currently archive 9 FB pages, 7 Twitter sites, and are working with Archive-It on possibly capturing a Pinterest page. At this year’s code4lib annual gathering, one speaker noted that decisions about what to collect are political and moral choices. How do we preserve the voices of marginalized groups and safeguard the privacy of individuals involved?

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As PTS has been building its web archive collections, the PTS community, students in particular, have been calling for a coordinated response to and actions against horrific violence wreaked on African Americans across the country.

One new resource is a budding web archive collection in conjunction with the Center for Black Church Studies at PTS. Focus will be on African Americans central to the history and life of Princeton Theological Seminary. The collection will preserve at-risk content and be a research portal on Black Church Studies.

SLIDE 9:

Some PTS African Americans are already well documented by other institutions and organizations, such as Milton Galamison, who earned graduate degrees from PTS in 1947 and 1949 and was minister of the Siloam Presbyterian Church in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn from 1948 until his death in 1988. He was also professor of education and urban affairs at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, director of School and Community Organized for Partnership in Education (SCOPE), chairman of the board of directors of the Opportunities Industrialization Center of New York, and a prominent civil rights activist in the 1960s, focused on public school desegregation. He was a PTS trustee from 1970 to 1973 and from 1980 until his death.

SLIDE 10:

Other church leaders with roots at PTS include Edler Garnet Hawkins, whose influential and far reaching ministry is more dispersed online. Hawkins was appointed Princeton’s first African American professor in 1971, teaching practical theology and Black literature at age 62. He had been pastor of St. Augustine Church in the Bronx for 32 years, growing membership there from 9 to more than 1,000 members. He was elected first African American moderator of the New York City Presbytery in 1958, and first African American moderator of the national denomination in 1964. Guest lecturers to his classes at Princeton Seminary included fellow civil rights leader and Martin Luther King Jr.’s strategist Wyatt T. Walker.

SLIDE 11:

I anticipate we’ll be archiving more news stories featuring alumni/ae like this, along with social media. Both present challenges, as we all know. I’m working with folks at Archive-It to capture only this story and not accompanying advertising. In the meantime, I followed advice from the Mid-Atlantic Archive-It User group, and contacted the producer directly, who shared the video file with me on Google drive. An example of Nicholas’ caveat to choose the more appropriate archiving tool for this content.

SLIDE 12:

Some PTS alumni/ae sites combine pastoral reflection and scholarship with promotion and marketing, such as this.

SLIDE 13:

Some local church sites are modest with primarily static content that hasn’t been updated in a while.

SLIDE 14:

Almost all continue the preaching and oral history strength on which the Black Church was founded. This site features a wealth of preaching video content.

SLIDE 15:

The seminary especially wants to preserve online scholarship of its faculty including this by Assistant Professor of New Testament Lisa Marie Bowens. This page is taken from the African American Lectionary. Rich with resources for scholars, historians, preachers, and pastors, the site contains several contributions from African Americans with PTS connections.

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Many African American clergy have full successful secular careers during the week in addition to their Sunday pastorates. These dual online ministries might offer opportunites for further research through network visualizations of data collected from the collection.

Down the road, researchers might interrogate data in the collection to explore how it represents the church at work in the world, what believers share, how they connect with each other, how Princeton Seminary reaches out to the larger community.

SLIDE 17:

An ambitious project? Yes. Essential and needed. Yes. More than 600 African Americans have attended Princeton Seminary. The institutional history is much, much more than dead white males.

Like many archives, PTS special collections has a small staff with limited resources.

Further, special collections staff should not be primary researchers. This project offers a means of engaging and empowering students who voiced their concerns about PTS history. Special Collections can lay the groundwork, create a pilot project, and get buy in from student groups, faculty and the administration. Then help professors guide students in examining the fuller historical record of PTS.

SLIDE 18:

We cannot and do not need to preserve web content from institutions with more resources than we have. We can and do need to collect and preserve sites related to the institutional mission that otherwise might not be available in a few years.

Prathia Hall was a distinguished alumna whose preaching provided the inspiration for Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Her prophetic witness is well documented online. Princeton Seminary, where she received her theological training in the 1970s, wants to preserve her work at and contributions to the Seminary. [Prathia Hall audio start at 10:20:49]