

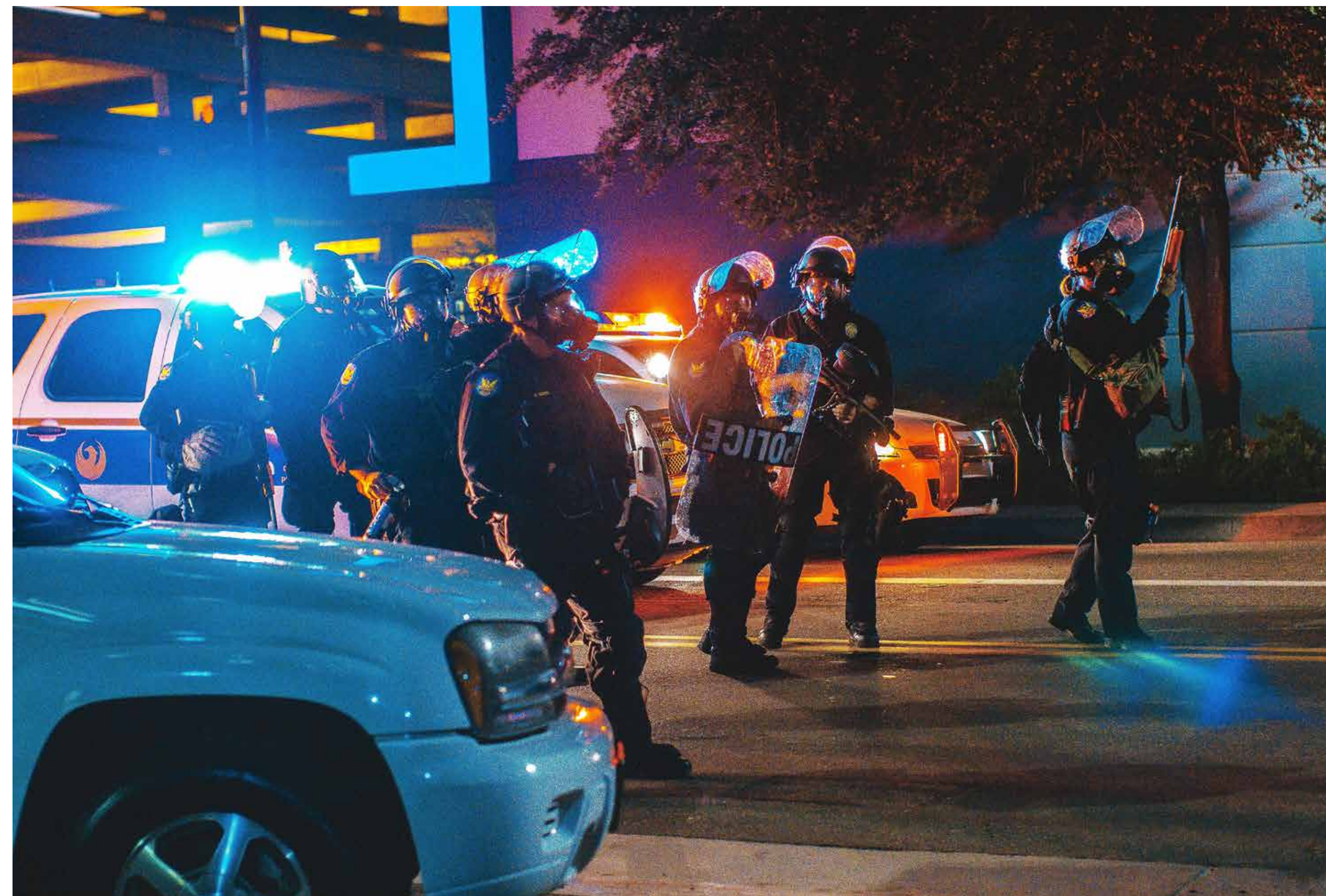
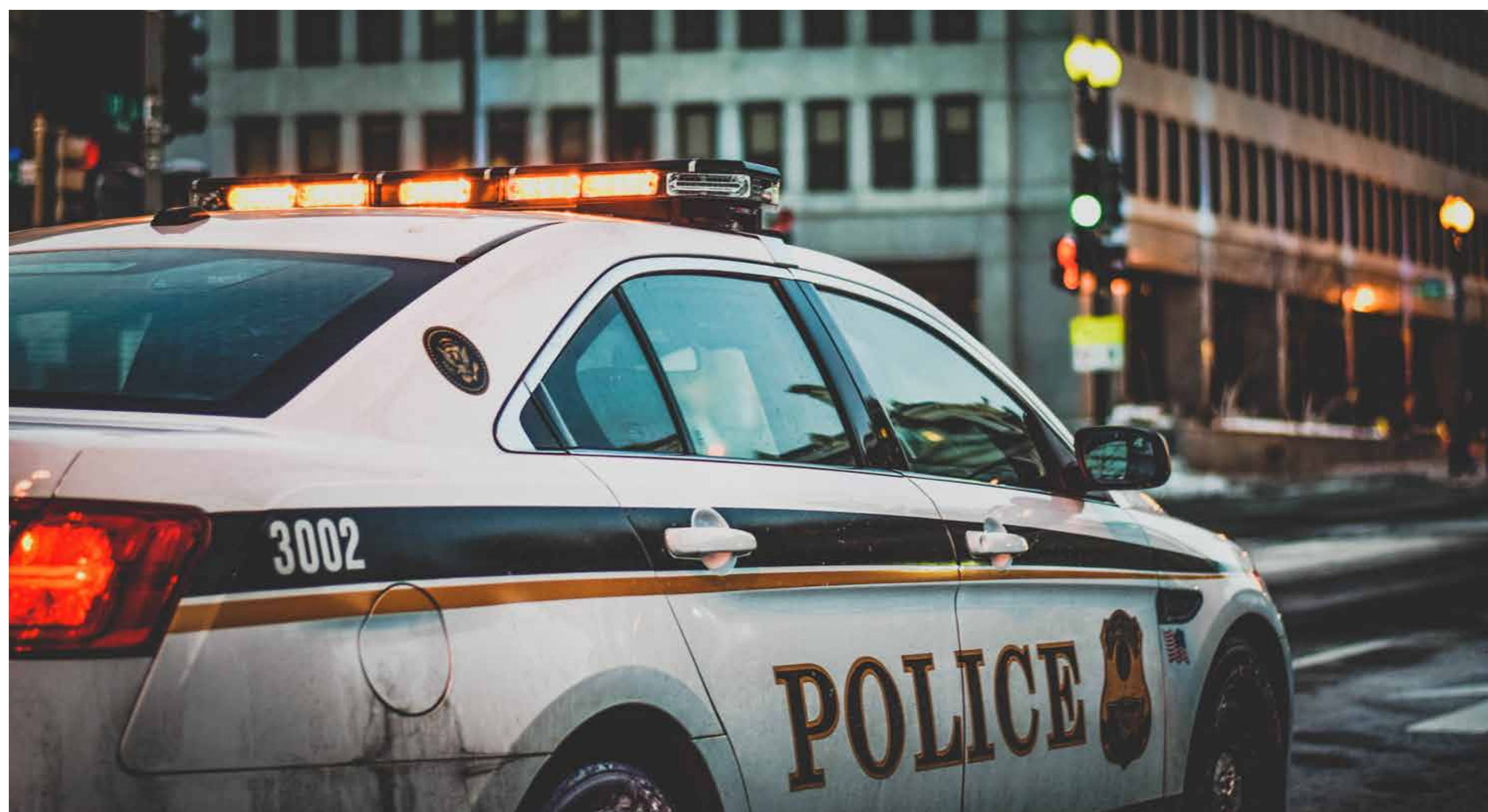


Community Archives Policing the Police



Abstract

As a response to the public outcry over the police killings of unarmed Black youth, police departments have implemented technology and big data to be more accountable. These include body cameras, license-plate readers, drones, and algorithms in predictive policing. However, these innovations may instead perpetuate oppression of marginalized communities and often lack standardized infrastructures. An activist, citizen, and archivist response to police brutality has been to create community archives documenting these incidents. Documenting Ferguson, Preserve the Baltimore Uprising Project, and A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland were designed by archivists and communities as a reaction to police shootings, unconstitutional practices, and racial discrimination. As law enforcement collects and creates more data about communities, can community-driven archives of police incidents help provide accountability and alternative narratives about police brutality?



Background

Police departments across the country have implemented predictive policing, which involves the use of big data and algorithms to determine where crimes may occur or who will commit them (Ferguson, 2017). They have also begun using technologies like body cameras, but lack long-term preservation strategies. Another issue is that footage cannot be accessed as a public record depending on the state (Ferguson, 2017). While technology was intended to provide transparency, this was idealistic, and policing algorithms based on biased data have further subjugated communities of color.

The archival profession has been involved in discourse around community archives and their role in improving equity and civil rights for underrepresented groups. Documenting Ferguson was initiated by librarians, archivists, and faculty at the University of Washington in St. Louis amidst protests and activism following the police shooting of the unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown in 2014 (Foster & Evans, 2016). Preserve the Baltimore Uprising Project and A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland were also catalyzed by police brutality, community response, and archivists wanting to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

Discussion

Existing literature on community archives addresses their challenges. Archivists working specifically with materials documenting police incidents should consider the following:

- To protect individuals, lawyers may need to be consulted when recording oral history interviews (Williams & Drake, 2017).
- Data management practices should be designed with privacy in mind. (Paris & Pierre, 2017) For example, should names or other information be encrypted if users upload content?
- When preserving social media content, archivists should follow ethical practices, such as those recommended by the project Documenting the Now (Friedman, 2017).
- Archivists need to put effort into building trusting relationships with communities, especially archivists employed by institutions of power (Foster & Evans, 2016).
- It is not enough to create digital archives—archivists should ensure that everyone across the digital divide can access them (Sandler, 2016).

Whether archivists are working with government records or with marginalized communities, they should be cognizant of how police are using data to describe communities. Further research needs to be done by archivists on implementing community archives that protect privacy but also create space for testimonies.

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