Defining an African Heritage in Alabama

The preservation of the history and culture of African-American communities and the sharing of that knowledge with the general public and academic researchers are prevalent issues in Alabama. The “African Heritage in Alabama” project intends to initiate the resolution of these issues through the following steps:

- Conducting surveys of various cultural and academic repositories throughout the state regarding how they preserve and promote local African-American history.
- Constructing a statewide catalog portal of archival, artifact, and manuscript collections held at each repository.
- Developing a Geographic Information Systems platform that allows for the visualization of datasets pulled from primary and secondary source documentation.
- Promoting a stronger web presence among repositories that contain African-American holdings and cultural organizations that cater to African-American communities.

In July 2015, a survey was sent to thirty-seven repositories throughout the state regarding their preservation and promotion of local African-American history. A variety of repositories were selected including municipal libraries, county archives, genealogical societies, state university repositories, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, historic preservation properties, and repositories specifically dedicated to the heritage of local African-American communities. As of August 14, 2015, ten repositories have responded regarding questions about the duties each organization performs, the types of holdings held at each repository, community outreach efforts that focus on African-American history, and the mediums used to promote African-American collections and scholarship to broader audiences. The following are the results collected to this point:

**Initial Results:**

- Some difficulty in establishing initial contact with repositories.
- As a whole, those organizations who responded are taking a variety of measures in educating the public regarding local African-American heritage.

**How do we apply the data:**

- Survey allows for contact with repositories that contain valuable collections that may not be readily accessible or publicized for potential researchers. Programs like the statewide digital archive collaborative AlabamaMosaic can assist these repositories in following best practices when digitizing and placing their materials online, as well as encourage overall preservation of their physical collections.
- Resource discovery platforms like GIS applications can provide flexibility in searching various types of data related to African-American history in Alabama. Applications used for experimenting with such technology include the Library of Congress’ Viewshare application and Google My Maps Pro.
- How do we represent the data collected here and in future investigations of African-American culture and history in Alabama? Are web mash-ups an option? Does such a technology promote preservation of data, dissemination of data, both or neither?