

Oct. 17, 2016 8:42 am

The creator of #ArchivesForBlackLives on the unbearable sadness of hashtags

By Juliana Reyes / staff

Jarrett Drake knows about the power of hashtags.

The **Princeton University** archivist (and contributor to Technical.ly) created #ArchivesSoWhite, inspired by D.C. activist **April Reign's** viral #OscarsSoWhite, and #ArchivesforBlackLives, both of which have rallied the archivist community around what's missing from the field. Here's his talk about the necessity of #ArchivesforBlackLives and an example of that work done by Drake and his colleagues in Cleveland last year.



The screenshot shows a Twitter thread. The top tweet is from Jarrett M. Drake (@jmddrake) dated 30 Jan, asking when archivists will join the #OscarsSoWhite action with #ArchivesSoWhite. The bottom tweet is a reply from the same user, stating that archives are like the Oscars but for "history makers," where only white people appear to make history, and it includes a #ArchivesSoWhite hashtag. The reply is timestamped 9:13 PM - 30 Jan 2016 and shows 7 retweets and 11 likes. A "Follow" button is visible next to the user's name in the second tweet.

Jarrett M. Drake @jmddrake 30 Jan
any when are archivists gonna get in on this #OscarsSoWhite action with #ArchivesSoWhite ?

Jarrett M. Drake @jmddrake [Follow](#)
i mean archives are like the oscars but for "history makers," in that only white people make history apparently
[#ArchivesSoWhite](#)
9:13 PM - 30 Jan 2016
7 11

But he also knows about the shortcomings of hashtags — here, he talks about how Twitter erases much of a hashtag's record — and more, the sadness and pain that some hashtags have come to represent.

In an interview with art publication *Sixty Inches for Center*

(<http://sixtyinchesfromcenter.org/archives-for-black-lives-an-interview-with-jarrett-m-drake>), **Analú López** asked Drake, “Do you think hashtags can increase people’s interest in

documenting their stories in addition to raising awareness among institutions of their shortcomings as far as diversity?”

“I think the hashtags can do that,” he said, “but I would prefer that institutions take proactive steps to do this work as opposed to waiting until another black child, woman, or man becomes a hashtag.”

Drake continued:

Why does the pain have to be so visible, the viciousness be videoed, in order for mostly white institutions of libraries and archives to give a damn about black lives? I think we’re in a technological and political moment much like a half-century ago when many white people watched the brutality of the Jim Crow south and could no longer, in a serious way, deny the horrors they witnessed. That’s what these Vines and videos are doing; they aren’t teaching black folk anything we didn’t already know about the violence and vitriol of anti-black policing, which is redundant. The question I’d have for white librarians and archivists is: why didn’t you believe us before? Why did things have to get this severe for you to feel compelled to act? And for some white people, they still will not act. I’m not delusional in thinking that the presentation of black death and suffering will move a great mass of white folks and their institutions into action.



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[Read the interview](#)

And don't miss Drake's Technical.ly piece on the dangers of placing trust in **Facebook**.

Juliana Reyes became Technical.ly's associate editor after reporting on the Philadelphia tech scene for four years. She's co-president of the Asian American Journalists Association Philadelphia chapter and a two-time Philadelphia News Award winner for "Community Reporting of the Year." The Bryn Mawr College grad lives in West Philly, likes her food spicy and wears jumpsuits often.