

As History Erasure Intensifies, Independent Internet Archives Are Helping Fortify The ‘Digital Preservation Infrastructure’



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04-25-2025 ~ *These online resources hold crucial information on history, social issues, and activism.*

Despite Donald Trump’s [disavowal](#) of Project 2025, his administration began enforcing that initiative’s agenda immediately after his second inauguration. This includes efforts to [erase history](#) through [education cuts, classroom and book censorship, website scrubbing](#), and the silencing of media outlets and institutions like [PBS, NPR](#), and [the Smithsonian American Art Museum](#).

One week after Trump’s inauguration on January 20, 2025, in a post on the online platform Free Government Information, data services librarian emeritus from the University of California, San Diego, James A. Jacobs [wrote](#), “There is a difference between the government changing a policy and the government erasing information, but the line between those two has blurred in the digital age... In the digital age, government publishing has shifted from the distribution of unalterable printed books to digital posts on government websites. Such digital publications can be moved, altered, and withdrawn at the flick of a switch. Publishing agencies are not required to preserve their own information, nor to provide free access to it.”

While noting that “digital government information was being lost before President Trump,” Jacobs stressed that “[t]he scale of loss and alteration of information under Trump may prove to be unprecedented” and that “librarians, archivists, and citizens” must create a “new distributed digital preservation infrastructure.”

Organizations like the [Freedom Archives](#) in Berkeley, California, have been working for decades to preserve online information on history, social issues, and activism. [Established](#) in 1999, this nonprofit educational facility houses audio, video, and print materials that “chronicle the progressive history of the Bay Area, the United States, and international movements for liberation and social justice,” according to the organization’s [website](#). Its [digital collection](#) of content on progressive movements, culture, and activism includes materials on subjects like Black liberation, gender and sexuality, and Indigenous struggles.

The Freedom Archives’ co-director and co-founder, Claude Marks, notes that conservative extremists “are purposefully rewriting history to eliminate references to slavery of Blacks from Africa and genocide against Indigenous people, and the purpose of that is to reify and reinforce white supremacy. Oftentimes, the truth lies more with the resisters who may have been defeated in various struggles with their colonizers. If that’s your shared point of view, you want to protect access to material that gives voice to those people who were engaged in liberatory struggles and were fighting for justice and human rights.”

For instance, nearly 37 states in the U.S. have measures in place “that limit how America’s undeniable [history of racism](#)—from chattel slavery to Jim Crow—can be discussed in public school classrooms,” according to a 2023 [article](#) in the Conversation.

Many fear this attempt to rewrite history, especially under the Trump administration, might have far-reaching consequences. “The danger isn’t just that they’ll purge accurate data from the past but that if and when that data is ever reposted that some of it will be modified with false information,” [said](#) Charles Gaba, a health care policy data analyst and web developer, according to a February 2025 Salon article.

As an independent organization, the Freedom Archives is largely funded through grassroots efforts. “We’re not vulnerable to: ‘Oh, we didn’t get that big grant through the Department of Education,’ which will no longer exist [soon],” Marks

says.

The Freedom Archives' staff has collaborated with archives and organizations like the [Manilatown Heritage Foundation](#), the [Bay Area Lesbian Archives](#), and the Los Angeles-based [Southern California Library](#), which “documents and makes accessible histories of struggles that challenge racism and other systems of oppression so we can all imagine and sustain possibilities for freedom.”

It has also worked with [Interference Archive](#), a Brooklyn, New York-based organization that curates in-person and online exhibits of “cultural ephemera” such as posters, books, zines, and flyers created by activists and participants in social movements. Interference Archive uses these materials “to animate histories of people mobilizing for social transformation” and to preserve and honor “histories and material culture that is often marginalized in mainstream institutions,” its website [states](#).

Highlighting the importance of these efforts to archive information, the New England Archivists [state](#), “Archives are the foundation of a democratic society. They exist to safeguard the rights of individuals, ensure transparency, and hold public servants accountable.”

Another notable online library is the [Internet Archive](#), whose [Wayback Machine](#) contains “more than 928 billion web pages saved over time,” the site explains. In March 2025, the Wayback Machine’s director, Mark Graham, [told](#) NPR that the Internet Archive was the only place to find an “[interactive timeline](#)” of the January 6, 2021, attack on the United States Capitol and that “it’s in the public’s interest to save such records.” More people have been referring to the information on the Internet Archive website since Trump took office.

In April 2025, the San Francisco Standard [reported](#) that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) had cut funding for the Internet Archive while the organization “was halfway through an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant of \$345,960.” Jefferson Bailey, the Internet Archive’s director of archiving and data services, said that funding from other sources would help the organization stay afloat, but he worried about the impact of the cuts on smaller nonprofits.

One such nonprofit is the [HathiTrust Digital Library](#), which contains digital copies of more than 18 million items from research libraries. The universities of the [Big](#)

[Ten Academic Alliance](#) (formerly known as the Committee on Institutional Cooperation) and the 11 libraries of the University of California launched the archive in 2008 “to ensure that those digitized collections—and the libraries that steward them—remain strong and serve scholarship into the future,” the website [explains](#). “Our reach now includes members outside of the United States. Over 18 million digitized library items are currently available, and our mission to expand the collective record of human knowledge is always evolving.”

Meanwhile, [the Zinn Education Project](#) (ZEP) provides educational materials for middle and high school teachers. “Based on the approach to history highlighted in [Howard Zinn’s](#) best-selling book *[A People’s History of the United States](#)*, our teaching materials emphasize the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history,” the site [states](#). Free downloadable lessons and articles are categorized by [theme](#), time period, and reading level.

A worldwide network of volunteers curates the [Marxist Internet Archive](#), a storehouse of writings by nearly 1,000 authors “representing a complete spectrum of political, philosophical, and scientific thought.” The site’s content comprises more than 180,000 documents published in 83 languages. Its founders’ primary motivation for starting this archive was to dispel misinformation and misconceptions about Marxism, the site [explains](#).

[Open Culture](#) consolidates, curates, and provides free access to culture and educational media, including [history](#), [politics](#), [education](#), [life](#), and [current affairs](#). “Web 2.0 has given us great amounts of intelligent audio and video,” the archive’s website [states](#). “It’s all free. It’s all enriching. But it’s also scattered across the web, and not easy to find. Our whole mission is to centralize this content... and give you access to this high-quality content whenever and wherever you want it.”

The Public Domain Review’s archives cover subjects like culture, history, politics, and war. “It’s our belief that the public domain is an invaluable and indispensable good, which—like our natural environment and our physical heritage—deserves to be explicitly recognized, protected, and appreciated,” the nonprofit’s [website](#) notes.

Many of these organizations’ ties to progressive movements extend far beyond archiving. For example, Marks says that “as participants in a broader struggle for

liberation, justice, and global values that are liberatory instead of oppressive and colonial,” the Freedom Archives’ staff participates in local and national activism and stays conscious of “the importance of causes like international solidarity—defending the right for Cuba to exist without an embargo, the right of the Palestinians to survive the genocide, and the right to their own identity and state. As long as we’re doing that, I have faith that all these movements will survive the brutality and the willingness of the powers of the empire to try to destroy them and snuff them out.”

By Damon Orion

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