# Connecting Our Past to Enshrine Our Future:

## A Digital History of African Americans in the US Military


For Kevin Clark, the Buffalo Soldiers project has been a labor of love for over ten years. Leveraging his own personal collection along with contributions from Kareem Abdul-Jabaar and others, he was able to gain the attention of Louis Gossett, Jr. and bring together entertainment luminaries to capture the history and legacy of the African American soldiers during the Civil War and beyond in the documentary, "**FOR LOVE OF LIBERTY: THE STORY OF AMERICA'S BLACK PATRIOTS**." Bringing that legacy to the screen through the documentary utilized the medium of film to teach our generation about our shared past; therefore, as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technologies capture the imagination of the next generation, Kevin is reimagining his project through the use and development of new interactive models.

Today's students need to learn a data science foundation that supports analysis, development, and documentation for the coming digital economy. Using media and historical archives like this documentary and from additional resources, this program aims to leverage data aggregation & analytics to teach the value and capabilities of STEM and AI into marginalized communities through institutions and workforce development programs. By using digital tools to extract information from media and historical data, students and residents can be taught to use technology and digital skills to build & develop the expertise in data science and machine learning to jumpstart new careers and professions.

This proposal outlines a comprehensive program for Community Labs, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Anderson School of Management, and a network of public and private sector partners to leverage data science, AI, and media for workforce development and historical exploration. To bridge the gap between data and action for a more equitable future, we must empower our students and communities through data-driven innovation.

## Community Labs Platform

Community Labs, operating on the Microsoft Azure platform, offers a flexible and efficient solution for hosting the data repository and AI models. As an independent organization, Community Labs can swiftly initiate and expand the project without the bureaucratic hurdles often associated with larger institutions. Powered by Microsoft, the open-source nature of the platform encourages broader participation and collaboration including a mix of education, training, and opportunities for professional certifications. While Community Labs may be a newer entity, a partnership with UCLA Anderson can enhance its credibility and attract additional contributors like the Department of Defense (DoD) and National Science Foundation (NSF). Moreover, Community Labs' expertise in data aggregation and

analysis ensures seamless integration of diverse datasets, facilitating a comprehensive and impactful project.

This platform will serve as a living laboratory for innovation, fostering data literacy, and empowering communities to take ownership of their history to preserve their future. Rigorous standards for platforms like this are only as good as the data that is ingested & aggregated, as well as the utilization of diverse teams to critically review the processes and procedures associated with the analysis and reporting methodologies. By working together, we can harness the power of data as a tool for empowerment rather than control.


The Buffalo Soldiers stood for the protection of order and the development of infrastructure as our country was expanding after a period of turmoil; today's communities need to gain the understanding of how to control their data-informed decision-making and digital agency to ensure the benefits of our stories and our future are shared equally by all. While the Soldiers protected settlers, this platform can be a first step in protecting our legacy while teaching the next generation the skills necessary to thrive and gain control of its destiny.

## Success through Collaboration

This program fosters a unique collaboration between academia, industry, and technology to unlock the potential of data science for workforce development and historical exploration. By leveraging student talent, established partnerships, and innovative technology, this program can empower communities, enrich historical understanding, and drive positive change.

### Partnerships

- **UCLA Anderson School of Management:** Provides student expertise in data science model development and media analysis within the entertainment industry.
- **Center for Media, Entertainment and Sports at UCLA**: Provides students with resources and opportunities to prepare for increasingly complex industries.
- **Department of Defense (DoD):** Connects its own STEM Engagement programs with external partners for historically underserved communities.
- **Microsoft:** Supports the program through its Azure cloud computing platform, AI capabilities, and policy & philanthropic engagement programs.
- **USC Shoah Foundation Institute (SFI):** Shares its experience in managing and interpreting historical data through compelling storytelling.
- **Annenberg School for Communication at USC:** Offers expertise in media and communication technologies.
- **California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR):** Provides resources and expertise in workforce development.
- **StoryFile:** Offers innovative tools for capturing and preserving oral histories.

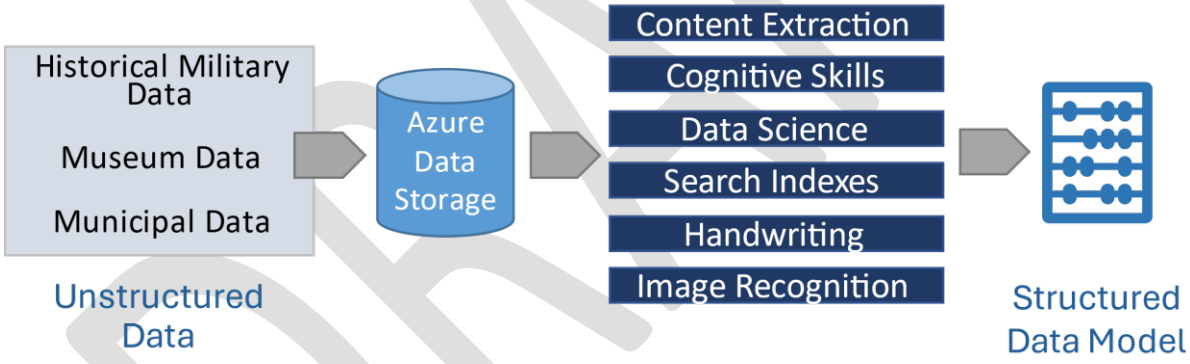
- **Lael Alexander:** Contributes experience in social justice and community engagement.

## Program Objectives

- **Workforce Development in Media and Entertainment:** Develop data science models that identify media and entertainment job market trends, skills gaps, and diversity & inclusion opportunities.
- **Historical Data Repository:** Create a central platform for information extracted from documentaries, museum archives, and oral histories using natural language processing (NLP) and other techniques.
- **AI-powered Connections:** Utilize Microsoft Azure and student-created models to identify connections across media content, historical records, and museum data.
- **HBCU and MSI Engagement:** Establish a repeatable framework for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to contribute museum data and train students in data science using the Community Labs platform.

## Program Phases (High Level)

- **Partnership Development:** Formalize agreements between all partners, outlining roles,




responsibilities, and data sharing protocols.

- **Student Recruitment:** UCLA Anderson provides opportunities for its students through data science projects, internships, or certificate programs.
- **Workforce Development Project:** Students collaborate with Community Labs and DIR to build data science models for workforce development in media and entertainment.
- **Documentary Data Repository:** Students use NLP to extract information from provided documentaries and integrate it with the data repository.
- **AI-powered Connection Development:** Students leverage Microsoft Azure and Community Labs' platform to build models for identifying connections across historical and media content.
- **HBCU and MSI Integration:** Establish a framework for HBCUs and MSIs to integrate their data and student workforce using the Community Labs platform.

- **Pilot Program Execution:** Implement the program with initial partners, collecting data, building models, and refining functionalities.
- **Evaluation and Expansion:** Evaluate pilot program success and expand participation to HBCUs and MSIs, creating a sustainable ecosystem.

Please refer to **Appendix A: Pilot Program Phases** for more information on program implementation and timelines.

## Program Benefits

- **Students:** Gain valuable data science experience, academic credit, and contribute to social good. Additionally, learn more about and further develop innovative engagement models to share the proud history of marginalized communities.
- **Community Labs:** Develops a robust AI platform for workforce development and historical analysis, attracting new users and partners.
- **HBCUs and MSIs:** Empowers students with data science skills and expands access to the Community Labs platform.
- **Media and Entertainment Industry:** Benefits from data-driven insights into skills gaps and workforce trends.
- **Historical and Cultural Institutions:** Gain a platform to share and connect their data with a broader audience.

The **UCLA Anderson School of Management** can significantly benefit from partnering with Community Labs, enhancing student learning opportunities, and strengthening ties with other institutions including HBCUs and MSIs. The **Center for Media, Entertainment and Sports** will be able to drive economic development through job training, assist in cementing faculty legacies, and expand UCLA's community engagement impact. Students will be the first to build the new data models, AI-tools, machine learning functionality, and leverage help to develop the capabilities of the platform & program. They will be able to write blog posts, white papers, and get professional credit for the work that they'll be doing as well as access apprenticeships, internships, and leverage the employment pipelines that will be created. Jay Tucker and John Burke can serve on a programmatic Board of Advisors and position UCLA as a leader in data-driven social innovation and workforce development. Overall, UCLA Anderson can prepare students for their professional futures, contribute to the revitalization of marginalized communities, and make a lasting impact on society.

The **Department of Defense** STEM engagement programs can significantly benefit from partnering with Community Labs. By leveraging the platform and programmatic expertise, the DoD can strengthen STEM education pipelines, drive innovation and workforce development, secure a skilled workforce, and enhance its reputation within the target communities. General Gordon-Bray and Colonel Victoria Bowens can further cement their legacies as pillars of marginalized communities by championing this program and serving

on the Board of Advisors, guiding its direction and ensuring its long-term success. Making a tangible and lasting impact on the future of STEM education and workforce development will not only benefit the military but also contribute to the overall health and prosperity of the nation.

**Microsoft** can significantly benefit from this partnership by showcasing its innovative technologies to a wide audience. Through Community Labs, Microsoft can introduce its Azure platform, GitHub, and other AI-powered solutions to students, educators, and community leaders across various regions and institutions. The open-source nature of these tools ensures broad accessibility and encourages participation from a diverse range of stakeholders. Microsoft's Nonprofit / Philanthropies group can leverage this partnership to engage with institutions and aligned nonprofits, fostering collaboration and driving positive change. Additionally, Microsoft's policy division can contribute to the program by tying in aspects of education, research, and community engagement. By working with Community Labs, Microsoft can advance its partner-led approach, strengthen its reputation as a leader in technology and social impact, and drive meaningful outcomes for communities across the country.

## Projected Outcomes

- **Student Development:** Students gain valuable data science skills, industry experience, and opportunities for professional advancement.
- **Historical Preservation:** A comprehensive data repository is created for historical research and education. This repository can be further built through each new partner and the ingenuity of every student who adds to the tapestry of shared experiences & community history.
- **Workforce Development:** The platform provides insights into media and entertainment job markets and facilitates skill development. The long-term value is realized through collaborative pivots and extensions into connected industries (e.g., e-sports & simulations, economic development, healthcare, housing, etc.)
- **Community Engagement:** The listening series fosters dialogue, awareness, and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. From in-person interviews to digital avatars, the stories can come to life for future generations and live on in their own right.
- **Sustainable Partnership:** A strong foundation is laid for long-term collaboration between Community Labs, UCLA Anderson, and all partners.

# A Call to Action

Join us in preserving and sharing the rich history of African American military service. By partnering with Community Labs, you can contribute to a groundbreaking initiative that leverages data science and AI to bring this vital history to life. Together, we can inspire future generations, promote diversity and inclusion, and create a more equitable and just society. Let's harness the power of data to honor the legacy of African American military heroes and pave the way for a brighter future.

## Next Steps

- Define partnership agreements.

- Develop detailed project plans and timelines.
- Secure necessary funding and resources.
- Launch a successful pilot program and expand to include HBCUs and MSIs.

By working together, Community Labs, UCLA Anderson, and this broad range of partners can create a program that benefits students, researchers, businesses, and communities for generations to come.

## Appendix A: Pilot Program Phases

**Phase 1: Partnership Development (September 2024)**

- **Formalize Agreements:** Establish legal and operational agreements between Community Labs, UCLA Anderson, the DoD, and Microsoft. May potentially also include DIR, USC, SFI, and/or StoryFile.
- **Define Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly outline the contributions and expectations of each partner.
- **Secure Funding:** Explore pilot funding opportunities from the DoD, NSF, and other sources.

**Phase 2: Student Recruitment and Training (September-October 2024)**

- **UCLA Anderson Recruitment:** Launch recruitment efforts for data science students interested in participating.
- **Training Workshops:** Conduct training workshops for students on data science techniques, media analysis, and ethical data handling.
- **Project Assignments:** Assign students to specific projects, such as workforce development models or data repository creation.

**Phase 3: Data Collection and Preparation (October-November 2024)**

- **Documentary Data Extraction:** Students use natural language processing (NLP) and AI image recognition to extract information from the selected documentaries and photography collections.
- **Historical Data Integration:** Collect data from museums, archives, and other sources relevant to the project.
- **Data Cleaning and Preparation:** Ensure data quality and consistency for analysis.

**Phase 4: Model Development and Testing (October-December 2024)**

- **Model Creation:** Students develop data science models using Azure and Community Labs' platform.
- **Model Testing and Validation:** Rigorously test and refine models to ensure accuracy and reliability.
- **Pilot Program Launch:** Initiate the pilot program with selected HBCU or MSI to test the platform and processes.

**Phase 5: Pilot Program Evaluation and Results (November-December 2024)**

- **Data Analysis:** Analyze pilot program data to assess outcomes and identify areas for improvement.
- **Outcome Measurement:** Measure the impact on student learning, workforce development, and historical understanding.
- **Prepare Pilot Program Report:** Document key findings and recommendations.

**Phase 6: Black History Month Listening Series and Partnership Expansion (February 2025)**

- **Organize Documentary Showings & Discussion:** Host four-part events in selected cities featuring documentaries, panel discussions, and networking opportunities.
- **Programmatic & Partner Announcements:** Announce expanded partnerships and funding commitments during the events.
- **Unveil Content and Education Pipeline:** Outline plans for continued development of media content, educational resources, and career pathways for students.
- **Explore Further Engagement:** Discuss opportunities for Community Labs to provide additional services to HBCUs and MSIs, potentially in conjunction with a University Affiliated Research Center (UARC).