Speculative Future *of* Archiving Immigrant Narratives

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Abstract

An interactive web-based narrative game and speculative digital museum exploring the intersection of Generative AI and Interactive Literature. The experience tasks players with navigating a procedurally generated library of fragmented social media posts managed by a dying AI. Focusing on the digital footprints of global immigration and assimilation, a variety of AI-generated artifacts reflect themes of memory, displacement, and cultural preservation, reimagining how we archive vulnerable human experiences in a digitized world.

Introduction/Background

Digital spaces and public discourse around global immigration are frequently reduced to cold statistics, hostile political rhetoric, or corporate algorithmic sorting. Before interactive digital archives addressed this, people seeking nuanced representations of migration struggled to find accessible, culturally responsive narrative platforms. Many barriers prevent audiences from engaging deeply with these stories—sensationalized headlines, algorithmic polarization, and a lack of empathetic, low-barrier spaces. Using emerging technology, interactive literature can lessen these barriers. Our project investigated how a web-based game combining a "Handmade Web" aesthetic, generative AI, and interactive categorization can archive fragmented immigrant narratives that are often overlooked or flattened by modern media.

Method

Our preparations included planning workflows, setting ethical guidelines, organizing production schedules, and discussing and identifying potential obstacles such as AI image generation issues of copyright theft, the spread of fake news, deep-fakes, and deep-seated social biases. A literature review on AI ethics, past and current history of immigration, disapora, and policies, and immigrant narratives told through images was distributed and followed up through sources such as the Library of Congress, New York Public Library (NYPL) Digital Collections, and more. Technical expertise in web design and development and generative image tools as well as selected image effects applications was shared, explained and integrated into the project.

Research and interpretation were the focus of the initial stage. We identified the scope of the experience, interaction mechanics, and the primary audience. We gathered thematic Image Content Categorization which provides context for the images, then Immigration past, current, and future Trends, relevant to displacement, belonging, and the particular differences between social media vs photojournalist photos. A review of image effects technology including Latent Space Morphing & Interpolation, Algorithmic Glitch & Data Corruption (Circuit Bending), Composite Memory (AI Collaging), and Inpainting for "Lossy" Reconstruction was also conducted to establish a methodology and a database with references to study real artifacts from the past and their significance through content and composition, for transforming online footprints into sacred digital artifacts.

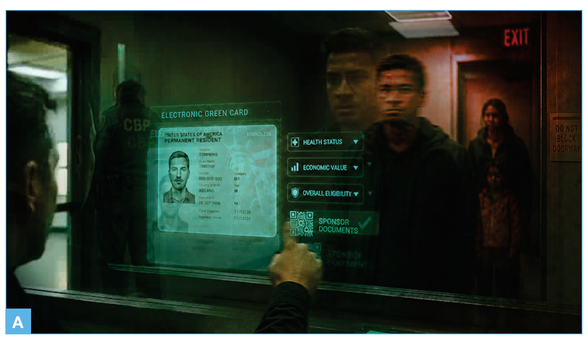


Fig A. *Image generated for the category of artifacts, using the image effect of Latent Space Morphing & Interpolation. The concept is of two guards at a concrete checkpoint screen scanning an immigrant father who stood with his wife, son, and daughter. The screen projects a glowing digital Green Card with the father's basic identification details, a real-time eligibility matrix, and a restricted QR code in the corner.*

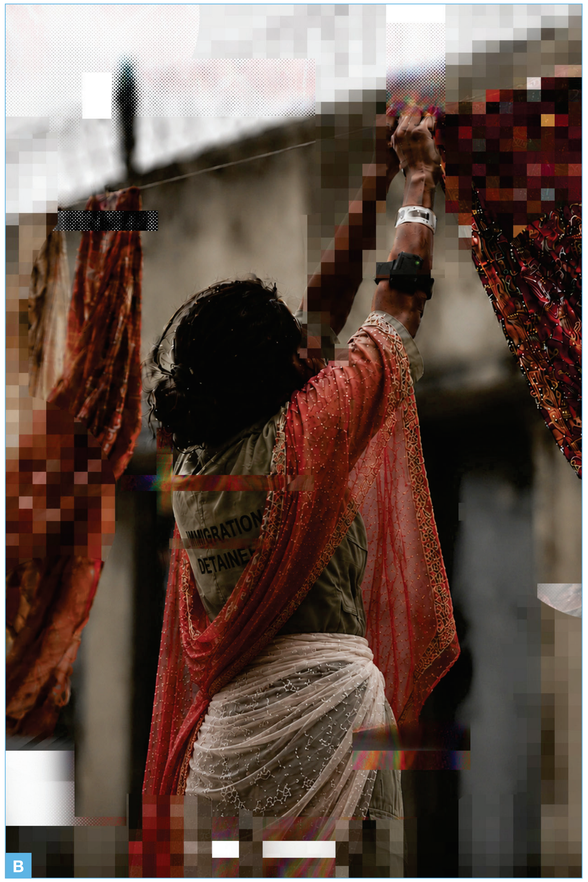


Fig B. *Image generated for the category of culture, using the image effect of glitching to simulate Algorithmic Glitch & Data Corruption. The concept is an angled composition of an Indian woman hanging her saree and shawl on a thin plastic line. The setting is cold, with a gloomy cast and brown walls. The bright bright red and salmon-colored cloth contrasts with the dull background. The textile features an intricate Indian floral pattern and linework stitched in gold threads, with delicate, shiny beads. The woman's back faces the viewer, exposing her immigrant uniform, arm-monitor, and band.*

During the next phase, we focused on artistic research, prompt engineering, and visual branding. Images were created,edited, and effects considered for each with clear concepts written for each and discussion about the storytelling and communicative power of the final images. Design research techniques were used to survey the "Handmade Web" and "digital forensics" aesthetics as a counter to the corporate UI. We also examined the project's conceptual foundations. A typographic and layout study was conducted at this stage, alongside early sketches of the player drone interface and library navigation.

Subsequent weeks were spent generating visual artifacts and building interactive and narrative elements both for the interface as well as each and every one of the images. We produced original AI art while conducting preliminary tests to evaluate emotional resonance, narrative clarity, and visual coherence. The production and iteration of two-dimensional social media artifacts and UI components brought the fragmented digital archive to life.

In the final phase, the core web game interface was finalized, and procedural categorization mechanics were implemented. The digital library was prototyped and expanded with unique entries for various migration stories. At this point, visual assets, accompanying narratives, references, and prompt workflows were refined and organized, and student researchers documented tool usage, ethical constraints, and cultural representation.

Results

We designed a playable web-based game and digital archive that incorporates generative AI image workflows and interactive literature. We also established an ethical framework and critical reflection workflow for student researchers generating cultural artifacts. Initial user testing showed that players engaged deeply with the non-linear act of categorization and interpreted the emotional landscapes of migration with increased empathy.

Discussion

Representing contemporary immigrant stories within a futuristic story space where so much is unknown was a primary concern, particularly regarding what to emphasize, what is relevant, and the tendencies of algorithmic bias and AI "hallucinations." To prevent distorting human experiences, we established strict ethical prompting guidelines and human-authored interventions followed by extensive discussion and referencing of similar projects to clarify what needed to be communicated. Refining the procedural artifact generation and game mechanics required extra development time to meet our narrative and ethical standards.

Limitation

The project has two key limitations: limited time prevents large-scale public interviews and testing, and the future expansion of the dataset requires ongoing guidance from cultural heritage, immigration, and social studies and political science scholars to ensure responsible growth beyond the initial archive. Further maintenance and hosting will be required in the future, which will also incur costs.

Conclusion

Our research and creative work focused on marginalized immigrant narratives, resulting in displayable artwork, a small website, and written deliverables. The process equips student researchers with critical digital literacy, AI fluency, and empathy. We plan to refine the game and co-author a research paper detailing students' contributions to design, ethics, and data analysis.

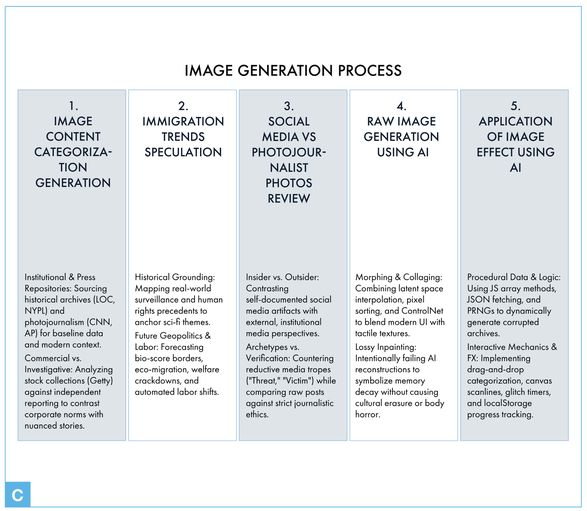


Fig C. *Chart that outlines a five-stage methodology of archival research, geopolitical speculation, and media analysis to inform visual creations. The process progresses from sourcing historical and contemporary media to generating raw AI images using various tools. It also applies interactive effects to simulate corrupted archives and digital decay.*



Fig D. *Image generated for the category of culture, using the image effect of glitching to simulate Algorithmic Glitch & Data Corruption. The concept is food packaging from street vendor stands across immigrant residential areas with embedded codes. Appearing to be commercially standard products, hidden on the inside of these candy wrappers, cans, bottle caps, etc., are fine-lined safe-house coordination points and antiviral distribution points.*

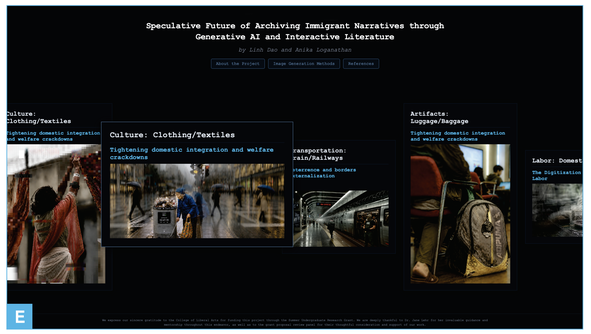


Fig E. *Screenshot of the homepage of the website. This interactive digital archive features a scrollable gallery of AI-generated artifacts exploring migration, displacement, and cultural memory across thematic categories like clothing, transportation, identity documentation, and labor. To reinforce the speculative narrative of retrieving ruined, scattered digital footprints, the site periodically pauses scrolling interaction to simulate data retrieval.*

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