

The People Could Fly

A FILM BY IMANI DENNISON



POV

DISCUSSION GUIDE





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Film Summary



The People Could Fly is a poetic look into the history of Black gathering spaces in Louisville, KY, from the 1960s to the mid-2000s. Intimate video portraits reveal the ritual of roller skating and how roller rinks emerged as sanctuaries for Black culture. Weaving together archival footage, still photos, recent material, and newsreel footage, the magic its city's Black community conjured shows an act of resistance in the face of segregation.

Using This Guide

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and is designed for people who want to use *The People Could Fly* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

The People Could Fly began as a meditation on roller skating, but it quickly revealed itself as something deeper—a reflection on how Black communities preserve memory through movement, music, and gathering. The roller rink is more than a recreational space; it is a living archive. It holds regional styles, DJ traditions, intergenerational relationships, and embodied knowledge that may never exist in a formal collection, yet remain essential to understanding Black life.

In making this film, I was interested in documenting joy as a form of preservation. Too often, archives center trauma while everyday rituals of pleasure and connection go unrecorded. This film asks what it means to safeguard those moments—and what we risk losing when community spaces disappear. I hope this conversation encourages us to think expansively about archives, and to recognize the preservation work already happening in our own lives.

-Imani Dennison

Key Participants

Louisville Roller Skating Community Members

Skaters, organizers, and elders who carry forward roller rink culture as a living archive of Black social life.

Rink DJs & Music Curators

Cultural historians in their own right, using sound to preserve lineage, regional style, and generational memory.

Families & Multi-Generational Skaters

Individuals who illustrate how skating spaces serve as intergenerational bridges and informal educational spaces.



Key Issues

The People Could Fly is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore:

- Black community spaces as living archives
- DIY and grassroots archiving practices
- Cultural memory and intergenerational knowledge
- Roller rinks as sanctuaries and sites of belonging
- Gentrification and the loss of community spaces
- Music as historical record
- Embodied memory and muscle memory
- Black joy as preservation practice

Background Information

Black Cultural Spaces as Living Archives

Archives are often imagined as formal institutions—climate-controlled rooms, labeled boxes, and digitized collections. Yet many Black communities have long practiced informal archiving through everyday rituals such as music, dance, foodways, fashion, oral storytelling, and gathering spaces. Informal archives are grassroots approaches to preserving memory and culture from the bottom up, and for Black communities that were historically underserved by institutions, this mode of archiving has been essential to preserving histories, community lifeways, and everyday people contributing to culture in large and small ways.

Not all archives are static, printed photos, written records, or preserved on shelves. For instance, roller rinks, like those featured in *The People Could Fly*, function as living archives. Living archives are dynamic and evolving approaches to history that function to keep the past alive in the present through shared community memory and social practices passed down to others. For example, the skate rinks preserve regional skate styles, DJ traditions, call-and-response rhythms, and social codes passed down through repetition and observation. Cultural historian Dr. Tina Campt describes Black archives as containing “the quiet frequencies of everyday life,” emphasizing that archival practice can include embodied and affective forms of memory. In this framework, skating itself becomes a record.

Because Black histories have frequently been excluded from institutional archives, communities have developed alternative methods of preservation—such as church programs, family photo albums, mixtapes, community bulletin boards, and oral history. These practices challenge dominant narratives about whose stories are deemed worthy of preservation.

Community Archiving & DIY Preservation

Community archiving refers to grassroots efforts to collect, document, and safeguard materials created by and for specific communities. According to the Society of American Archivists, community archives are collections that document the history of a community and are maintained by members of that community.

DIY archiving can include:

- Digitizing photographs and VHS tapes
- Recording oral histories with elders
- Cataloging music sets and DJ recordings
- Preserving flyers, skate lineups, or rink memorabilia
- Creating shared digital folders or neighborhood archives

These practices are especially urgent as gentrification and redevelopment threaten physical gathering spaces. When a rink closes, what happens to the memory held there? Who decides what is preserved—and how?

The National Museum of African American History & Culture emphasizes that preserving everyday objects helps tell a fuller story of Black life. The same principle applies to local skate cultures and community spaces.

Sources:

Campt, Tina M. *Listening to Images*. Duke University Press, 2017.

National Museum of African American History and Culture. "Saving African American Treasures." *Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture*, nmaahc.si.edu. Accessed Jan. 2026.

Society of American Archivists. "Community Archives." *Society of American Archivists*, www2.archivists.org. Accessed Jan. 2026.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.

- **What image, sound, or moment from the film stayed with you? Why?**
- **How did the film make you feel—joyful, nostalgic, protective, concerned?**
- **Did the film shift your understanding of what an “archive” can be? If so, how?**
- **Where do you see evidence of preservation happening in the film?**

ROLLER RINKS AS ARCHIVES

- In what ways does the roller rink function as more than just a recreational space?
- How is knowledge transmitted between generations in the film?
- What does skating preserve that might not be captured in a traditional archive?
- How do music and DJ sets operate as historical records?
- What happens when spaces like this disappear? What is lost beyond the building itself?

DIY & COMMUNITY ARCHIVING

- What examples of informal or DIY archiving did you notice in the film?
- Who holds responsibility for preserving community histories—institutions or individuals? Why?
- What barriers might communities face in preserving their own archives?
- How can technology both support and complicate grassroots archiving efforts?
- Have you ever participated in preserving family or community history? What did that look like?

BLACK JOY AS PRESERVATION

- How does joy function as resistance in the film?
- In what ways does documenting joy disrupt narratives that focus solely on trauma?
- What role does embodiment—movement, rhythm, muscle memory—play in preservation?
- Why might everyday Black social life be considered historically significant?



CLOSING QUESTION

OPTIONAL

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

- What is one space in your own life that feels like a living archive?
- What is one story, object, or ritual you would want preserved for future generations?
- What is one concrete action you could take this year to safeguard a piece of community memory?

CLOSING ACTIVITY

Invite participants to write down one item they would include in a "community time capsule." Share aloud if comfortable.

TAKING ACTION

If the group needs support in generating next steps:

- Learn how to engage in personal or community archival processes using the provided resources.
- Organize a community scanning day to digitize family photos.
- Record an elder's oral history using a smartphone.
- Partner with a local library or cultural center to deposit materials.
- Start a shared Google Drive or community archive for flyers, playlists, and photographs.
- Document local cultural spaces before they close or change ownership.

Resources

[The Black Archives \(Miami, FL\)](#)

An institution preserving the history of Black communities in South Florida.

[Community Archiving Workshop Handbook](#)

This resource offers guidance and tools for anyone wanting to engage in the work of community archiving.

[Digital Public Library of America \(DPLA\)](#)

Open-access digital archive with community partnership initiatives.

[National Museum of African American History & Culture – Community Curation Program](#)

Resources for preserving family and community history.

[Society of American Archivists \(SAA\)](#)

Professional organization offering resources on community archiving practices.

[StoryCorps](#)

A platform dedicated to recording and preserving oral histories.

Credits & Acknowledgments



About the Author

Imani Dennison is a multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker whose work explores memory, folklore, and Black communal life through film, sound, and installation.

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