

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Columbia University's History Lab Unveils Revolutionary AI-Powered Archive of 5 Million Declassified Documents

First conversational AI interface for exploring decades of CIA, State Department, and intelligence records launches at Federal Depository Library Conference

NEW YORK, NY – September 26, 2025 – Columbia University's History Lab today announced the public launch of History Lab AI, the world's largest AI-powered archive of declassified government documents, unveiled this afternoon at the [Federal Depository Library Conference](#). The groundbreaking platform enables anyone with internet access to explore over 5 million once-secret records through natural language conversation with an advanced AI assistant.

History Lab, whose work on government secrecy and declassification has been featured in [The Washington Post](#), [NPR](#), and [Democracy Now!](#), has now created a revolutionary interface that transforms how researchers, journalists, students, and the public can access and understand historical government records. Instead of navigating complex keyword searches across scattered databases, users can simply ask questions in plain English about any topic from nuclear weapons to covert operations.

"We're democratizing access to the raw stuff of history, records that for decades were hidden away in secret government offices," said Matthew Connelly, Professor of History at Columbia University and founder of History Lab. "What once required years of searching from archive to archive might now be accomplished in minutes through a conversation with AI."

The new system, available immediately at <https://lab.history.columbia.edu/history-lab-llm>, represents the culmination of years of research into government transparency and the declassification crisis that Connelly documented in his book [The Declassification Engine](#).

Unprecedented Scale and Scope

The archive encompasses 18 million pages of documents spanning from 1941 to 2005, including:

- CIA CREST collection (1941-2005)
- State Department Central Foreign Policy File (1973-1979)
- Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)
- Presidential Daily Briefings (1946-1977)
- Declassified records from the Pentagon, NATO, and other military and intelligence organizations

Nick Chimicles, Project Lead for History Lab AI, explained the technical innovation: "We've combined advanced semantic search with retrieval-augmented generation to create an AI that doesn't just find documents—it reads, synthesizes, and explains them in context. The system uses vector embeddings to understand meaning beyond keywords, finding connections across millions of documents that would be impossible for human researchers to discover."

Breaking Down Barriers to Historical Research

During a six-month pilot program with approximately 300 users, the platform supported over 800 research sessions and 3,600 user interactions. Early adopters ranged from academic historians to high school students, demonstrating the system's broad accessibility.

The platform addresses a critical challenge in government transparency. As Connelly's research has shown, the average lag between historical events and document release has increased from under 10 years in 1900 to over 40 years today, with the pace of declassification slowing dramatically since the 1960s.

"The declassification system is fundamentally broken," noted Raymond Hicks, Project Manager at History Lab. "This AI interface helps researchers navigate the documents that have been released while we continue advocating for greater transparency."

Open Source and Community-Driven

In keeping with academic principles of openness, History Lab has released the complete source code for the AI system on GitHub (<https://github.com/Ramus-Network/chat-agent-historylab>), enabling other institutions to build similar platforms for their own archives.

"Every archive should be conversational," said Chimicles. "By open-sourcing our approach, we're inviting libraries, museums, and archives worldwide to join us in making historical collections more accessible through AI."

Funding and Support

History Lab has received support from the National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, MacArthur Foundation, American Council of Learned Societies, Arcadia, and the Mellon Foundation, reflecting broad institutional recognition of its potential impact on historical research and public knowledge.

Looking Forward

History Lab AI represents just the beginning of the lab's vision for AI-enhanced historical research. The team is already working on integrating the Model Context Protocol (MCP), which

will allow any AI assistant to query historical archives while maintaining institutional control over access and citations.

The platform is available for free public use immediately at <https://lab.history.columbia.edu/history-lab-llm>.

About History Lab

History Lab at Columbia University operates the world's largest database of declassified records and develops innovative digital tools for historical research. The lab applies computational methods to support government transparency and accountability through data-driven analysis. Learn more at <https://lab.history.columbia.edu>.

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