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## Archives in Conversation

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In a recent meeting with *American Archivist* editor Amy Cooper Cary, the three of us were reflecting on the decisions that led us into archives. For Amy, who went to library school later in life and was transfixed by a class in the history of books and printing, the decision was to pursue archives as a second career. For Stephanie, who wrote a paper that centered on a manuscript collection for a graduate English course, the decision was to apply to an MLIS program soon after. And for Rose, who discovered archives as an undergraduate, the decision was to leave a late-night job in food service for a day shift in her university's special collections and archives. These decisions, at the time, seemed relatively inconsequential, but they set each of us on a path to this profession, which has profoundly changed all our lives.

Reviews are, by definition, reflective; they examine the themes an author or creator explored and the decisions they made in the wider context of history, theory, and practice. Reviews are also conversations that, like our conversation with Amy, can lead to revelations about ourselves and others. Most often, the conversation is between a reviewer and an author or between a reviewer and their readers. But reviews have the potential to spark broader conversations across time and space, between readers now and in the future.

This issue coincides with the launching of a new series on the *American Archivist* Reviews Portal that we hope will encourage reflection and engagement throughout the archives community. Intergenerational Conversations<sup>2</sup> intends to foster ongoing dialogue between new voices in the archives profession and authors whose work shaped the professional literature years ago. In the first year of this series, we explore the works of archives scholar, practitioner, Society of American Archivists (SAA) Fellow, and former SAA president John Fleckner. We encourage you to visit the series on the Portal, read Fleckner's work and our reviewers' commentaries, and share your thoughts about both by commenting on the pieces. We look forward to continuing to engage with you throughout the series.

Like Intergenerational Conversations, the reviews in this issue center on conversations. These conversations bridge differences in occupations, practices, viewpoints, values, and beliefs. They feature collaborations between archivists, librarians, educators, curators, activists, and communities. We begin with reviews of two books

about teaching with primary sources: *What Primary Sources Teach: Lessons for Every Classroom*, written by Jen Hoyer, Kaitlin H. Holt, and Julia Pelaez and reviewed by Sara Lyons Davis, and *Engaging Undergraduates in Primary Source Research*, edited by Lijuan Xu and reviewed by Kayla Harris. The former explores how staff at the Brooklyn Public Library incorporated archival materials into K–12 lessons about local history. The latter describes how archivists, librarians, and faculty in undergraduate programs can integrate special collections materials into everything from scientific writing to environmental history courses. Although these works have different goals, they both emphasize the importance of collaboration between archivists and educators. Furthermore, they foreground the potential of archives to engage students across ages and disciplines in inclusive, accessible ways.

Inclusivity and accessibility are also themes in Claire Du Laney's review of *Exhibiting the Archive: Space, Encounter, and Experience* by Peter Lester. Lester argues that archival exhibits should move beyond linear frameworks that focus on the research value of collections to the embodied experiences of patron interactions with archival exhibits. For Lester, users include not only members of the public but also archivists and curators. This highlights his belief that participatory and community cocreated exhibits can lead to new archival encounters for all.

Marissa Friedman's review of *Viral Cultures: Activist Archiving in the Age of AIDS* by Marika Cifor likewise shows how archivists can play a role in collaborating with communities as well as facilitating recordkeeping for the purpose of social justice. Cifor traces how archivists, curators, and activists have documented AIDS activism over time and how collaborators at three New York institutions use these archives to challenge narratives that downplay the present-day impact of AIDS on marginalized communities. Bailey Adolph's review of *The Disability Archive UK* on the Portal explores similar themes by examining how the digital archive provides free access to and promotes the visibility of writings of disability scholars and activists.

The legacy of the past as well as its impact on marginalized communities to this day are themes in the next two reviews in this issue: Amber Glen's review of *Rescued from Oblivion: Historical Cultures in the Early United States* by Alea Henle, and Heather Mulliner's review of *Narrative Expansions: Interpreting Decolonisation in Academic Libraries*, edited by Jess Crilly and Regina Everitt. In *Rescued from Oblivion*, Henle describes how the frequent choice of early US historical societies to exclude materials by and about marginalized communities continues to impact the availability of archival materials about these communities today. The very practices that Henle describes are why decolonization—the theme of *Narrative Expansions* and the international case studies it offers—is a necessary step for addressing colonialism's legacy and building equity within archives. The topic of erasure, which looms large in these works, is also one that Janelle Monáe (singer and now author) explores in *The Memory Librarian and Other Stories of Dirty Computer*. On the Portal, reviewer Adina Riggins explores how this fictional book invites the reader to imagine a future

dominated by unethical archives. In Mon e’s work, the authoritarian regime New Dawn collects and erases the memories of its citizens. While this differs from what is described in *Rescued from Oblivion and Narrative Expansions*, the result is the same: a past that can never be remembered in its entirety.

Even as archivists collaborate with educators, curators, activists, and communities to address the legacies of the past, Jessica Tai’s review of *Cultural Humility* by David A. Hurley, Sarah R. Kostelecky, and Lori Townsend reminds us of the necessity of adopting cultural humility to redress power imbalances and structural inequalities. At both the individual and institutional levels, we must critically reflect on our attitudes, assumptions, and actions to ensure we recognize the limits of our knowledge and are prepared to put in the work necessary to build meaningful relationships across communities and cultures.

It is with this sense of humility and critical self-reflection that we launched the Intergenerational Conversations series and that we hope you will continue to engage with us on important topics, trends, and issues in the profession.

## On the Reviews Portal

(Published between October 2022 and February 2023)

Adolph, Bailey. Review of *The Disability Archive UK*. December 28, 2022. <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2022/12/28/the-disability-archive-uk>.

Buchanan, Rose, John Fleckner, Rand Jimerson, and Stephanie Luke. “Intergenerational Conversations: Reflecting on the Work of John Fleckner.” January 26, 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/4h68c5wh>.

Neal, Jessica C. “Fleckner Revisited: Reflections on Being an Archivist, Then and Now.” February 22, 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/bdeju5p2>.

Riggins, Adina. Review of *The Memory Librarian and Other Stories of Dirty Computer*. October 6, 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/24yn4ssk>.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All views expressed in this essay are the authors’ own. They do not represent the views of the authors’ institutions nor any agency or office of the US government.

<sup>2</sup> The *American Archivist* Reviews Portal, “Intergenerational Conversations,” <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/intergenerational-conversations/>.