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Reviews

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Reviews

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Wesley J. Chenault, Sarah M. Dorpinghaus, Joshua Kitchens, Jana Meyer, Renna Tuten, and Carol Waggoner-Angleton

BOOK REVIEWS

Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense. By Ann Laura Stoler (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009, 316 pp.)

In *Along the Archival Grain*, Ann Laura Stoler, a professor of anthropology and historical studies, continues a critical engagement with questions of documentation, power relations, and knowledge explored in her numerous other works, including *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (2002) and *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995). She endeavors to tease apart how power relations related to national identity, empire, race, and moral character were inscribed in records of governance and technologies of rule during a distant colonial past. In this book, Stoler's focus is the official archives amassed by the Dutch colonial state of nineteenth-century Netherland Indies (now Indonesia), and her approach is "archives-as-process" rather than "archives-as-things." Clarifying the former, Stoler states her interest in "the colonial order of things as seen through the record of archival productions" (20).

Stoler's *modus operandi* is deconstructive and involves close textual readings of primary sources, coupled with a commanding grasp of seventeenth through nineteenth century European intellectual history. Through this approach, she moves beyond a view of records as simple registers of official actions, commands, and decisions to one that views colonial archives as sources documenting uncertain authorities, unintended consequences, and imperial anxieties that rub against notions of rationality, reason and order. Understanding this critical and cultural method partially explains the book's title, an evocation inspired by Walter Benjamin's widely quoted admonition to "brush history against the grain." The

choice of title and approach places *Along the Archival Grain* in company with the past decade's trend in arts and humanities scholarship that utilizes "archive" and "archives" as analytical concepts – not physical collections, places, or spaces – to examine notions of memory, affect, and more.

Along the Archival Grain starts with a two-chapter introduction, which details the theoretical underpinnings and methodological approach shaping the subsequent main sections. In Chapters 1-2, Stoler describes her ideological framework about colonial histories, empiricism, governmental recordkeeping practices, race, and narrative. She moves between a range of theorists from Levi-Strauss to Michel Foucault before shifting to her subject – Dutch colonial archival documents and the Netherland Indies, roughly from the 1830s to the 1930s. Each of the two main sections, Parts 1 and 2, contains two to three supporting chapters. These focus on the state of colonial studies and a critical reading of the history of late nineteenth and early twentieth century governing practices of the Netherland Indies. The final two chapters hone in on the life of Frans Carl Valck, a mid-level civil servant of the colonial state, which provides a telescopic view of the conflicts and tensions in day-to-day life between colonizer and colonized, capital and labor.

While the subject of the book may hold little interest for the archival community at large and some may find Stoler's dense, jargon-filled writing style off-putting, portions of this book – especially the first two chapters – will engage archivists who follow trends in humanities scholarship or practitioners who keep track of the ways in which notions of "archives" circulate in academia and society in general.

The past few years have witnessed a slew of books ostensibly about archives. Among the more recent ones, including *Along the Archival Grain*, are *Beyond the*

Archives: Research as a Lived Process (2008) and *Archive Story: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (2005). It is notable that a common thread to these books is a lack of acknowledgment of, or engagement with, a century long history of archival literature. Conversely, only a handful of thinkers and writers in the profession – examples being Terry Cook, Dominique Daniel, Margaret Hedstrom, and Randall Jimerson – engage humanities-based critical cultural theory of the past few decades to refine and redefine archival theories and practices. These gaps and overlaps aside, *Along the Archival Grain* will be of value to those interested in the place of archives within current humanities scholarship about narrative, authority, power, history, evidence and memory.

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How to Keep Union Records. Edited by Michael Nash.
(Chicago, Illinois: Society of American Archivists, 2010.
240 pp.)

Wisconsin's anti-union debate and the growing unemployment rate prove the continued relevance of union records and labor archives. The publication of *How to Keep Union Records*, a compilation of essays edited by Michael Nash, could not have been timelier.

Nash's volume is an updated and expanded edition of Debra Bernhardt's 1992 manual *How to Keep Union Records: A Guide for Local Union Officers and Staff*. Ten essays written by knowledgeable archivists and curators traverse the challenges of managing union records. Contained within are discussions on basic archival theories

and best practices, as well as suggested retention schedules, sample forms, and practical tips.

The book begins with Nash's historical survey of labor archives from their emergence in the late 19th century to the growth of academic interest in the 1970s and 1980s. Coincidentally, the first major attempt to collect data from union records was instigated by Richard Ely and John Commons of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where earlier this year tens of thousands protested legislation that could potentially abolish collective bargaining rights. Nash also emphasizes the role of historical research and writing in transforming how union records are maintained. Pamela Hackbart-Dean's essay continues the discussion by focusing on the relationship between unions and repositories. She stresses the importance of fostering trust, communication, and cooperation with union members to ensure records are properly preserved. Her essay also describes donor relationships at several US labor archives, including the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University.

Similar to conventional archivists, those working with union records confront an assortment of problematic issues on a daily basis. It has been estimated that only 1-5% of union records have permanent historical value. Thomas James Connors' essay tackles the difficult but necessary task of evaluating records. He presents several points to consider during the appraisal process, including assessing records for their ability to meet union information needs as well as the needs of the scholarly community.

Another challenge is presented by mergers and consolidations, which create periods when union records are particularly vulnerable to destruction. James Quigel, Jr. discusses the critical role of the records manager in preserving local records during this transitional phase. The numerous access, security, and copyright issues that arise when opening union records to the public are addressed in

Diana Shenk's essay. She also briefly describes the three common user communities (scholars and students, general public researchers, and the unions who created the records) and to what purpose the records are most often used.

Oral histories are an essential part of documenting the experiences of rank-and-file workers. Lauren Kata does an excellent job addressing the subjective nature of oral histories and the complexity of recording historical memory rather than hard fact. She provides tips on enlisting volunteers, conducting interviews, and purchasing recording equipment. Kata also discusses the ethical and legal concerns in recording oral history interviews.

The last two essays highlight the necessity and challenges of preserving non-paper formats. Photographs, audiovisual recordings, and artifacts provide rich illustrations of working class culture not often found in official union paperwork. For example, banners, songs, and cartoons contain symbols and slogans that depict workers' perspectives and appeals. Barbara Morley stresses the importance of understanding the context of labor-related artifacts and recordings. Who created the item and for what purpose? Who was responsible for its preservation and why? The final essay addresses the most recent challenge faced by the archival community— electronic records. Emails and websites have become important means of communication between union members and local and national chapters. They are ephemeral by nature, yet subject to the same litigations and audits as paper records. Michael Nash and Julia Sosnowsky present a list of current best practices, yet acknowledge that few repositories have the resources to manage electronic records according to these standards. The essay also includes an intriguing discussion of the difficulties in determining the validity and authenticity of electronic records.

The book concludes with a bibliography and a comprehensive directory of labor archives in the United States.

Nash has successfully created a manual that serves a wide spectrum of records managers and archivists. Regardless of one's experience, readers will find useful and intriguing discussions of the unique issues presented by union records. The publication's one blemish is that at times it can be repetitious. Undeniably, this is a negligible flaw. Whether you are fresh out of graduate school or counting the days to retirement, *How to Keep Union Records* is a worthy addition to your bookshelves.

Sarah M. Dorpinghaus
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Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods.

Edited by Maria Accardi, Emily Drabinski, Alana Kumbier,
(Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2010. 341 pp.)

Critical Library Instruction is an excellent primer that will help begin serious discussions about the best methods for conducting instruction sessions. This book's collection of chapters authored by a wide array of librarians and teaching faculty, offer the reader different approaches to the theoretical backgrounds of library instruction, focusing on how critical pedagogy can best be used. This book does provide some resources on how to implement innovative instruction methods, such as problem-based learning. Unfortunately, these practical guides are few. What the book does best is to expose and remind us to ponder different ways to approach to library or literacy instruction.

One of the main themes found throughout *Critical Library Instruction* is the importance of critical pedagogy. For those unfamiliar, critical pedagogy, as defined by Henry Giroux, is “the educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action.”¹ Giroux also believe that “Critical pedagogy offers the best, perhaps the only, chance for young people to develop and assert a sense of their rights and responsibilities to participate in governing, and not simply to be governed.”² If there is any fault to be found with this book, it is that it relies too much on this philosophy as a basis for library instruction. The inclusion of different approaches would have made for a more rounded discussion.

Critical Library Instruction is arranged into five sections. These sections are devoted to different aspects of thinking about instruction. The sections cover theory, toolkits for classrooms, teaching in context, working with unconventional sources such as Wikipedia, and dealing with institutional power. The second section is the most useful in the book because it provides not only discussion of different theories and approaches to instruction, but also “concrete lesson plans and classroom strategies” (xii)

One of the most fascinating chapters in *Critical Library Instruction* is Damian Duffy’s “Out of the Margins into the Panels: Toward a theory of comics a medium of critical pedagogy.” In his chapter, Duffy set out to demonstrate an “overlap between comic and critical pedagogy” and explain the place of comics in critical library pedagogy (199). He effectively does this through the medium of comics. It is a very rare treat to find a

¹ Henry Giroux, “Lessons From Paulo Freire,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (17 October 2010).

² Ibid.

scholarly comic, especially one that makes such a good case for using the comic book or graphic novel as an important tool in a library's educational and information literacy programs.

Of particular interest to those who teach instruction sessions focusing on primary source/archival research or lead courses on archival studies is Lisa Hooper's chapter "Breaking the Ontological Mold: Bringing Postmodernism and Critical Pedagogy into Archival Educational Programming." The philosophy of Postmodernism asks us to disavow the objectivity of records in favor of examining the social, culture and linguistic constructs in which they were created. Often times, postmodernism does not allow its adherents to say that there is a universal truth to be found within archival materials. This contempt for objectivity and truth frightens many, archivists included, but many of the ideas expounded by the likes of Michel Foucault are worth incorporating in some capacity into archival instruction. Specifically, it's important to consider the types of documents that are selected for instruction sessions and the stories they tell students. Hooper insists that "the archivist should consciously work to provide documents that not only challenge their own authoritative legitimacy, but that also provide insight into events from the perspective of the subaltern and Other in addition to the dominant force" (136). The representation of the Other's perspective in archival instruction is very important concept that many of us would be wise to take to heart. Hooper does an excellent job of engaging this complex philosophy and showing how postmodernism can be used to create deep learning experiences for students.

Overall this work does more to generate thoughts and new ideas than provide a handbook to implementing the techniques and theories described within its covers, but this does not diminish its value. Theoretical discussions can lead to a deeper understanding, or at least a questioning of,

why we do the things we do when we step in front of a group of students. While this book may not guide you to change you instruction sessions, it will begin the conversation.

Joshua Kitchens
Georgia College and State University

The Ethical Archivist. By Elena S. Danielson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2010. 437 pp.)

Ethical dilemmas challenge people in all professions, and archivists are no exception. Indeed, archivists may face more ethical issues than many professionals because of their close work with donors and their families. In addition, the nature of archival documents themselves often raise ethical problems – archives by definition are composed of private papers that were often never intended for public consumption and that may contain sensitive information. The Society of American Archivists has attempted to provide some guidance for professionals through the creation of a code of ethics and the publication of books such as Elena S. Danielson's *The Ethical Archivist*.

In *The Ethical Archivist*, Elena S. Danielson argues that archivists face unique ethical challenges in their profession, and that these challenges arise directly from the nature of archival work (7). Furthermore, she argues that the importance of archives in shaping the collective memory of society demands caretakers who are responsible stewards—ones who make thoughtful and ethical decisions. Danielson also explores the limitations of a code of ethics such as the one created by the Society of American Archivists. In the process of ethical decision-making,

Danielson contends that following a code of ethics is not enough in itself; codes can be contradictory and cannot possibly take into account the myriad situations that archivists face in the course of their work. Danielson proposes that archivists should not mindlessly follow the precepts laid out in a code, no matter how well formulated. The intention of her book is to generate further discussion regarding a number of areas in which archivists often face ethical decisions.

Danielson begins her discussion by reviewing the evolution of ethical codes, especially the code of ethics adopted by the Society of American Archivists. Readers may find this chapter ironic as Danielson contends that codes of ethics may not be helpful in resolving ethical problems. However, codes of ethics do provide a basis by which to begin to evaluate problems, and as such, Danielson's opening chapter can be justified. After the introductory material, Danielson's book is then subdivided into several areas reviewing ethical decision-making. Topics covered include acquisition, disposal, equitable access, privacy, authenticity, and displaced archives. By focusing on these topics, Danielson covers a number of problem areas but avoids overextending her discussion by trying to cover every possibility. Case studies and a list of questions for further discussion are also included for each topic.

One of the strengths of Danielson's book is that she does not try to dictate how archivists should respond to ethical problems; her book is not a practical manual that outlines the correct responses to certain situations. Readers seeking a specific answer to an ethical quandary should look elsewhere. *The Ethical Archivist* also generally avoids giving legal advice. Ethical and legal issues often overlap, but laws change over time and it is often better for archivists to seek legal counsel in such cases. Danielson recognizes that solutions will vary depending on the

circumstances of the case and the nature of the repository. She is able to cover broader principles by distancing herself from the role of an advisor.

Over the course of the book, Danielson presents a number of case studies from archivists working in a variety of repositories. Those who have read other publications on archival ethics may be disappointed with the case studies discussed in Danielson's book. A number of them are classic examples from the field, which may already be familiar to some readers. However, readers new to discussions of archival ethics will find that the case studies are engaging and enhance the readability of the book; Danielson's case studies do illustrate points from the text and provide memorable examples of the ethical nature of archival work.

Answers to ethical problems are typically not straightforward. *The Ethical Archivist* provides guidance in such situations, and is a contribution to ethical discussions in the field. Archivists will benefit from increased discussion of ethical issues; dialog with colleagues can be one of the most useful means of resolving these situations. Archivists—both newcomers to the field as well as the more experienced—will profit from reading Danielson's book, which covers a number of common ethical problems unique to the profession. As caretakers of the documentary record, archivists make decisions that will have repercussions on how society will remember historical events. By provoking new thoughts and encouraging discussion, *The Ethical Archivist* contributes to making sure those decisions are ethical ones.

Jana Meyer
The South Carolina Historical Society

An American Political Archives Reader. Edited by Karen Dawley Paul, Glenn R. Gray, and L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 477 pp.)

The editors of this book have assembled one of the best collections of recent scholarship in regard to the acquisition, description, and access to congressional collections. Over the past thirty years, many changes have taken place in the area of documenting Congress and its members as well as in methods of access to these materials. The Congressional Papers Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists was formed in 1984 and in 1990 a resolution was passed on Capitol Hill forming the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress. The Association of Centers for the Study of Congress was established in 2003 so that a support network for repositories holding these records would be created as a means of further standardizing the collecting process by involving not only archivists and records managers, but also historians, political scientists and politicians themselves. This compilation could widely be interpreted as the product of all of this activity.

An American Political Archives Reader is divided into six sections: Acquiring Political Collections, Documenting Congress, Appraising Political Collections, Arranging and Describing Political Collections, Building Research Centers, and Using Political Collections. While best practices in regard to all of these topics are covered in Cynthia Pease Miller's *Managing Congressional Collections* (Chicago: SAA, 2008), the *Reader* provides case studies that give life to Miller's recommendations. These studies are of particular help in an area of collection and processing in which the lines of personal and public are blurred: collections are privately given but contain records in which the majority pertains to the public. As many uncertainties are based on the availability of resources such

as staff, funding and spatial concerns, Miller's recommendations paired with the writing in the *Reader* are a boon to professionals.

While the majority of issues in regard to working with congressional offices and the staffers within remain relatively unchanged, there are constantly evolving matters that will need to be addressed in subsequent publications. Electronic records preservation and accessibility is foremost among those areas. Elisabeth Butler and Karen Dawley Paul discuss various means used for various ends by offices in Chapter 10. At the time of writing, only a dozen office or so used the in-house system OnBase; however, a wide selection of approved tools were available including Correspondence Management Systems, Legislative Information Systems, LANs in each office, specially created databases, legislators' homepages, and each offices' email system. Some of the potential problems involved in acquiring and preserving these specific records have been alleviated due to advances in electronic records curation; however, for every system, structure, and format that is "conquered" by archivists, another system is created with more issues, such as proprietary data storage, interpretation, and retrieval.

Another idea that has been discussed for over five years within the profession is the advent of the "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP) method of appraisal and arrangement. While widely considered an accepted standard in archives today, its advantages and disadvantages are still debated among archivists working with congressional collections. Larry Weimer writes in Chapter 21 "An Embarrassment of Riches" that although the methods described and proposed in Greene and Meissner's seminal article were already practiced in a great many repositories, resistance to fully employing them in regard to congressional collections is still ongoing as some practitioners interpret the proposed methods as a way of

allowing information that might need redaction or review to slip through the cracks. Weimer states that the point of MPLP is to encourage flexibility in processing and encourages the adoption of the practice in order to “perform a level of efficient and expeditious processing” while still honoring the responsibility of due diligence.

An American Political Archives Reader is applicable to a much wider audience than many perceive. While the framework is based on congressional collections, the lessons within can be applied to many areas of acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, description and access. Any archivists tasked with processing extremely large collections (i.e. 500 linear feet or more) should be heartened by the advice within. Issues of privacy and security are also great contributions to the bigger conversation outside of this specific collecting area as well as those regarding artifacts and museum objects. This volume is a significant contribution to literature focusing on legislative archives and subsequent scholarship in this area will owe it much.

Renna Tuten
University of Georgia

Archival Anxiety and the Vocational Calling. By Richard J. Cox (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books LLC., 2010. 355 pp.)

Richard J. Cox has a distinguished career as a professor of archival studies and prolific author on archival issues. There is an element to this book that leads the reader to categorize it as an autobiography, not of Cox’s life, but of his mind. Cox may even intend it as such. At the conclusion of chapter two, Cox expresses his reflective mood, which may have inspired him to once again wrestle

with issues which disturb him. This book is also a hellfire and damnation sermon, to the faithful and the unfaithful of the archival world, to examine our souls and commit our lives to the highest ideals of archival practice. Cox promises “[a]s for me, I will continue to take on unpopular issues within the archives community, but these, after this book, will be more restricted to my classroom and other essays. I weary a bit of the public debates that reflect that most members of the profession are busy tending to their own gardens...to care about cases questioning the role, leadership, and activities of either NARA or SAA. I can hear the voices of the others in the lifeboat telling me to sit down” (204).

There is a good deal to ruminate on in these three hundred odd pages. Cox addresses a range of issues: the ideal candidate for the archival profession, how best a professional association can represent archivists to the public, the responsibilities of a professional association to regulate and discipline its associates, which organizations provide leadership to the profession and how they provide this leadership, the position of ethics within the profession, and the education of practitioners, especially in regards to ethics.

Cox feels that the core issues of professional organization – leadership, ethics and education – are the most critical in the debate for the future of archives and archivists. The issues that determine our responses to our mission (preserving records to secure evidence in record keeping, holding organizations and governments accountable to a democratic society and insuring our national and cultural memory) have needed concerted thought and debate and will need even more consideration as we adapt our mission to our changing technological environment.

For those who feel they must educate themselves on these core issues, Cox’s book is a boon to self-study. In

each chapter, he discusses authors and books that have influenced his viewpoint. Works he recommends are: Benjamin Hubbauer's *Presidential Temples*, and Pallitto and Weaver's *Presidential Secrecy and the Law* or Bruce Montgomery's *Subverting Open*. Unlike many experts, he even recommends works he does not ultimately agree with, feeling they offer thoughtful scholarship to the debate. The main thrust of the book centers on Cox's disapproval of actions taken by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the Society of American Archivists (SAA), which he felt invalidated these organizations commitments to the preservation of and access to public records. Cox focuses on NARA's role in the reclassification of previously declassified documents, and the unwillingness of NARA to cooperate with researchers wishing to see public records of NARA's operations. He also details his disagreement with positions taken by SAA towards NARA, and actions the SAA has taken in the preservation of its own public records. The chapter on SAA's failure to archive its listserv is a good case study about the dilemma an organization can get into when there is a lack of planning. SAA leadership made a unilateral decision to shut down the listserv archive after 15 years. The leadership failed to understand that they must make the case to the shareholders to justify their actions. The membership, bred to the bone to believe in consensus before action, lashed back at the leadership and hostilities commenced. This chapter is strongly recommended reading. It is a morality tale in how *not* to make a decision in any organization but especially one in which the membership is purely voluntary.

Cox should remember that SAA is not the only professional association in which archivists are interested. Many of us turn to our state and regional associations because they are a better fit for our needs and because local organizations discuss our most pressing issues. Proximity

plays a role. In our local organizations we can insure that we will be able to invest the time, energy and money necessary for true participation. When formulating an understanding of best practice as we confront our day-to-day issues, we turn to a variety of organizations of which SAA is only one. Is the real question that archivists feel truly leaderless or that they feel less need for a strong national organization than Cox would like?

Anxiety is an apt word to include in the title of this book. Cox is genuinely concerned with the archival profession and this book does reflect an “unpleasant emotional state with qualities of apprehension, dread, distress and uneasiness” over the state of the archival profession.³ The points Cox has enumerated are legitimate concerns and his voice has a role in debating them. Cox admits that past experiences over time have formed his views; his fixation is expressed in his vehemence, which can make the reader dubious of his argument.

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³ "Anxiety." *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*. London: Penguin, 2009.