

“Take the Trouble to Compile a Whole New World:” The Role of Event-Based Participatory Projects in Institutional Archives

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ABSTRACT

In 1970, Howard Zinn gave an address to the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and called upon the archival profession to discard pretensions of neutrality and “take the trouble to compile a whole new world of documentary material, about the lives, desires, needs, of ordinary people” (Zinn 1977, 25). This marked a turning point and highlighted the movement to push the archival profession away from protecting the status quo and towards an endeavor for a more democratic and pluralized archival record in which the records of ordinary people are as valued as those of powerful groups and individuals. This dissertation, which is at the data collection and analysis stage, is largely an exploration of one type of such effort: participatory archive collection day events. This study examines how ordinary people and their communities connect to archival records and to archival institutions. The communities represented in these archives are varied and their members are often referred to as “ordinary people” in the literature on movements to pluralize archival records.

Through a combination of primary source data analysis and ethnographic field data collection and analysis, this project will investigate the ties between archival institutions, communities, records, and memory in participatory archive initiatives. Using Bastian’s (2003) community of records framework, I aim to examine how communities of ordinary people in archival institutions use event-based mediated participatory archive projects to create meaning, memory, and relationships based on personal and community records.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

archives; community engagement; specific populations; social justice

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

digital archives; community-based archives; participatory archive initiatives; communities of records; digital cultural heritage