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Archives are People: Love, Hope, and Courage for Our Future

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# Archives are People:

Love, Hope, and Courage for Our Future<sup>1</sup>

Audra Eagle Yun

*This is the edited text of a plenary that was delivered to the Society of California Archivists Annual General Meeting on May 20, 2022 in Palm Springs, California. Authenticity and reciprocity can help archivists revolutionize archival work. After all we've been through, what do archivists \*represent\* right now, and what do we want for our future?*

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Thank you for being here. This is the first in-person professional event I have attended in a very long time, and it may be the first event for many of you. We are still in a global pandemic. We have been through so much grief, feelings of isolation, feeling unappreciated, and feeling burned out. Thank you for being present today in the ways you can be, for showing up for the sake of community. Thank you to all of the people who made this conference possible under these precarious circumstances. I also want to acknowledge the people who *cannot* be with us today.

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Once, when I was about six years old, I heard a sentence I would never forget. I was sitting next to a boy my age on the school bus through the countryside, looking out the window at the live oak trees covered with Spanish moss, spiky palmettos, and dark sinkholes that were so common in North Florida. When we stopped at The Hammocks, a small apartment complex on the edge of town, the boy pointed at a huge live oak in a field and said, “they used to hang Black people there. They call it Lynch Hammock.” He said it with such a knowing that I believed him. We passed the Hammocks on the bus every day, and the truth of his words reverberated with me.

I looked through the little window at the field every day when the bus stopped there. But there was no marker. There was not a monument. There was not a museum. We didn't read about it in the newspaper. No one taught me about it in school. In the Alachua

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<sup>1</sup> This text is edited from a plenary delivered to the Society of California Archivists Annual General Meeting on May 20, 2022 in Palm Springs, California.

County history booklet we read in second or third grade, there was no mention, no memory.

Newberry, Florida is about 40 miles down the road from Rosewood, a primarily Black town that was destroyed by whites in 1923 and that witnessed the rampant torture and massacre of the town's Black population which was subsequently memorialized in a feature film of the same name<sup>2</sup>. My parents moved to Newberry from Jacksonville in the 80s, bought a used mobile home, and moved it to an old pine tree farm that had just been harvested and partitioned into small land plots. They moved to Florida from northern Ohio...to start their lives again, to forget old wounds, and create new selves. We knew nothing of this place.

Our little town did not have a public library until I was in middle school, so we would drive a little over a half hour into downtown Gainesville to visit the headquarters of the Alachua County Public Library to check out books. Like many of you, the public library was central to my understanding of the world and fostered a lifelong love of learning. The headquarters branch also had a large central lobby, which would occasionally feature exhibits of art or photographs.

When I was about 10, we entered the library and stood before a new exhibit, these looming partitions with historical photographs reproduced at a very large scale.<sup>3</sup> As if a spotlight were on it, a horrific image stood facing us. The image of a crowd of well-dressed, affluent white men, looking into the camera lens defiantly, gleefully posing – standing above the dead bodies of several Black people who had been carelessly laid before the crowd. A caption said something, but the only words that were seared into my mind were: near NEWBERRY, FLORIDA.

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<sup>2</sup> “Jan. 1, 1923: Rosewood Massacre.” Zinn Education Project. *This Day in History*. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/rosewood-massacre/>.

<sup>3</sup> The exact dates of this exhibit are unclear to me and the image I remember is disputed among historians and journalists as of the time of this writing. I do not recall the exact year, but I saw a photograph at the Alachua County Public Library that said it depicted Newberry, Florida. After reaching out to the reference department at the ACPL Headquarters in 2006, I spoke with Dr. Marvin Dunn and he said that he was awarded a grant from the Florida Humanities Council in 1997 to build a Black Florida History traveling exhibit, which spent about a month in the main branch of the Alachua County Library and included a photograph of Newberry. Some journalists believe that the photograph that Dr. Dunn has in his collection is of a lynching that took place in Lake City, Florida. However, based on research by author Janis Owens, employees of the Dudley Farm Historic State Park identified faces of local leaders who appear in the photograph. See Janis Owens, [Hidden in Plain Sight: A History of the Newberry Mass Lynching of 1916](#). Virginia Beach, VA: Köehlerbooks, 2021. Furthermore, the history of anti-Black violence and terror at the hands of whites in Florida is well documented in visual, written, and oral recordkeeping, including mob lynchings of Black individuals in Newberry.

It was true. What was whispered, denied, and ignored – Lynch Hammock was real, and it was documented. That photograph changed my life’s trajectory, although I didn’t realize it at the time.

I went on to focus on writing when I got to high school...that, and getting as far away from Newberry as I could. I wrote about imaginary places, aspired for something beyond the limestone dirt roads, somehow believing that there was something better out there for me. Through my self-centered and wishful writing, I was fortunate enough to get accepted to my dream college on a need-based scholarship. I left Newberry right after graduating from high school, all too happy to leave the place and my memories behind.

In college, I enrolled in a course called “documentary poetry” taught by a visiting professor I had never heard of: Natasha Trethewey. I wrote about Natasha’s application of Black feminist pedagogy through an article in the *National Political Science Review*:

We spent a great deal of time reading the work of other poets who centered their work on filling in the missing narratives and erasures in the historical record through “documentary poetry,” including Rita Dove, Andrew Hudgins, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Elizabeth Alexander. We read Bellocq’s Ophelia and Trethewey described her experience of interacting with haunting images from glass plate negatives of sex workers in New Orleans’ Storyville around the year 1912. These images transfixed her attention, both for their depiction of fair-skinned Black women, and for all that they *did not* tell the viewer about the time, place, and personal histories of Storyville’s sex workers. Trethewey imagined the perspective of the subject of the photographs, creating a firsthand narrative for Ophelia and turning the gaze back to the reader. I was compelled by this approach as an effort to imagine history through a combination of ekphrasis and vivid creative narrative.<sup>4</sup>

The final product for the course was a poetry portfolio. I knew exactly what I wanted to write about.

Lynch Hammock

Here the wind comes like a secret, hot and sudden,  
Savored like a last breath, breaking boughs like necks,  
You will hear echoes of denied prayers, then murmurs  
Of the thousands who caught a glimpse of our strange fruit.

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<sup>4</sup> Audra Eagle Yun. "Theories of Time and Space": Natasha Trethewey's Black Feminist Pedagogy. *National Political Science Review* Vol. 20, Iss. 2, (2019): 153-155.  
<https://www.ncobps.org/assets/uploads/2020/09/Volume-20.2-National-Political-Science-Review.pdf>

The summer rain washes away footprints and tire tracks,  
Growing grass where cameras flashed and tears once fell.  
You'll see no marker, nothing but the Hammocks,  
Whispering secrets beneath the glaring, stifling sun.<sup>5</sup>

My own lineage is from European immigrants from Italy, Ireland, and England to Appalachia and Ohio. There are not many records from the generations of laborers who precede me. What I know is that my ancestry is a mix of choosing to forget, of keeping secrets, and of choosing to start again, and again, and again. Or, I guess you could say, of running away from pasts that we don't know how to repair.

Throughout college, I worked evenings in the campus library, shelving books and checking out items at the circulation desk. I was drawn to librarianship because of my experiences in libraries as a young person – that ideas matter, that questions matter. In the best libraries, it didn't matter how much money you had, who you knew, or what school you attended. The library was a site of social justice to me, and I wanted to participate in that work.

I moved across the country to attend UCLA's MLIS program, where there was a growing focus on community archives under the leadership of professor Anne Gilliland. In library school, the connection between community archives (grassroots efforts for communities to preserve and provide access to their own histories) and documentary poetry (which strives to fill in gaps in history through imagined or enhanced poetic narratives) became clear for me. In a class visit by self-proclaimed "rogue" archivist Yolanda Retter-Vargas, she described her work to collect orphaned photographs of Chicano/Latino communities and incorporate them into the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center from places as far-flung as swap meets and yard sales.<sup>6</sup> She was proactively and decidedly prioritizing preservation of the histories of communities that had been marginalized and made invisible in large institutional archives. She passed away while I was still in grad school. Although I never had the chance to be her student, Yolanda's direct approach to archival visibility stayed with me - especially the importance of self-determination and self-representation in archival collections and description.

My master's paper cited literature articulating the symbolic and emotional value of community-based archives, including Jeannette Bastian, that "a people cannot truly be

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<sup>5</sup> Audra Eagle Yun, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> This collection is now accessible in the UCLA Library: the Yolanda Retter-Vargas Collection of Orphan Photographs, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0019q5n3>. See also Elaine Woo. "Yolanda Retter, 59; controversial activist for lesbian, minority rights." Los Angeles Times, August 29, 2007. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-aug-29-me-retter29-story.html>.

masters of their own history and understand their identity unless they have access to their records.”<sup>7</sup> A people must also be empowered to tell their own *stories* - as these are themselves records that can supplant the traditional archival record.

In my portfolio, I used this image of the moment when Dr. Marvin Dunn – the Florida-born historian and private collector who organized the exhibit that changed my life more than a decade before – places the curled-up, original photograph into the hands of the woman who owns the land where Lynch Hammock is located.<sup>8</sup> I was transfixed by this moment, which emblemizes the complexities of provenance, custody, and access in archives. The desire to possess, to own, and to preserve archives can too often be held above the voices, the stories, and the memory of those being represented.

But the love, courage, and hope of people who believe that we can build something new - even if we might fail - is what will revolutionize our field. We *can* transform archives. Let me tell you what I mean.

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UC Irvine is home to the Southeast Asian Archive, a collection that emphasizes the history of the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao diasporas.<sup>9</sup> It was established in 1987 by a research librarian in response to the Orange County community’s interest in seeing these histories documented and made accessible. The community drove collecting for the SEAA through our board of advisors, including gifts of records from advocacy organizations and the papers of community leaders.

Since 2012, we have hired Thuy Vo Dang as the curator for the Southeast Asian Archive, Krystal Tribbett as the curator for Orange County regional history, and Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez as the Assistant University Archivist (now, Digital Archivist.) Something interesting started to happen. In Thuy, Krystal, and Elvia’s collaborations with faculty on workshops and consultations supporting proactive documentation, we saw that students and youth were key to considering how academic libraries could rethink, critique, and

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<sup>7</sup> Jeannette A. Bastian. [Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost Its Archives and Found Its History](#). Westport, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited, 2003. Pp. 84.

<sup>8</sup> During the plenary, I displayed a version of the image that is owned by Marvin Dunn, altered into a blurry view of the original, to avoid gratuitous visual display of traumatic and sensitive content, and also to more clearly emphasize that the purpose of displaying the image was to show the screen grab from a documentary produced by journalist Claudia Adrian and filmmaker Isaac Brown entitled “Lynched and Forgotten,” which aired on Current TV in 2008. Full disclosure: My sister and I were interviewed for the production on our perceptions of racism and segregation in our town. The television channel, founded by Al Gore, no longer exists; it became Al Jazeera America but the website where the film was posted has been deleted.

<sup>9</sup> <https://seaa.lib.uci.edu/>.

redefine archival work. We learned from the research of Michelle Caswell, Mario Ramirez, Marika Cifor, Jimmy Zavala, and others on the potential of *representational belonging* to counteract the background of symbolic annihilation in archives.<sup>10</sup> Basically, we needed to center our community – students of the university – in the reparative, representational work of transforming archives and special collections.

Students were telling us and showing us what we had gotten wrong in documenting our campus and our local region, and taking the archival skills with them in their lives, to their families, and to their communities.<sup>11</sup>

We knew that UCI students, many of whom identify themselves as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color, connected more with archives that reflected their own lived experiences. Thuy and Krystal had been working with faculty in ethnic studies who wanted to create classroom experiences where students could interact with primary source materials reflecting social justice movements, document their own families and communities, and also scaffold relationships with community-based organizations in the region whose records and work were not being preserved.

In 2016, we proposed an idea to the IMLS that we called “Transforming Knowledge, Transforming Libraries,” which was a research project to explore the outcomes of undergraduate students applying what they learned in ethnic studies - combined with lived experience - in contributing to community archives.<sup>12</sup>

For this grant we partnered with UCI’s departments of African American Studies, Chicano/Latino Studies, and Asian American Studies. We sought to research how academic libraries might become essential partners in providing ethnic studies students with the tools and language to articulate, present, preserve, and disseminate community

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<sup>10</sup> We found several resources valuable in the early years of our collaborations with faculty, especially Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario Ramirez. “‘To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing’: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives.” *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 56–81.

<https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.56>; Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor. “‘To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise’: Community Archives and the Importance of Representation.” *Archives and Records* 38, no. 1 (2016): 5–26.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2016.1260445>; and Jessica Tai, Jimmy Zavala, Joyce Gabiola, Gracen Brilmyer, and Michelle Caswell. “Summoning the Ghosts: Records as Agents in Community Archives,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 6, Article 18 (2019)

<https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol6/iss1/18>.

<sup>11</sup> Past and ongoing projects and initiatives are listed at <https://ocseaa.lib.uci.edu/partnerships>. During the plenary, I displayed images representing the following projects: “The Material of Memory: Revisiting Our Histories of Immigration,” at <https://sohanews.wordpress.com/2017/03/21/the-material-of-memory-revisiting-our-histories-of-immigration/>; “Research on Beginnings of Activism for the Department of Asian American Studies (BADAAS) at UCI,” at <https://sites.uci.edu/badaas/>; and UCI PrisonPandemic, at <https://prisonpandemic.uci.edu/>.

<sup>12</sup> [https://ocseaa.lib.uci.edu/imls\\_grant](https://ocseaa.lib.uci.edu/imls_grant).

history. We argued that LIS diversity programs are limited because they tend to focus on the “who” more than the “what” of an inclusive and diverse profession, with little to no impact on the field and its practice. So we wanted to demonstrate how an ethnic studies-library partnership might allow students to make use of their own lived experience and networks to build, interpret, and preserve cultural heritage. Ethnic studies and community archives both aim to address the issue of communities that have been left out, displaced or underrepresented in the historical record. Both areas empower individuals and communities by directly engaging people in critical analysis (in the case of ethnic studies) or the creation and distribution (in the case of community archives) of their own knowledge and information.

In the first year of the TKTL project, I had the privilege of hearing Fobazi Ettarh speak at the Pushing the Margins Symposium at UCLA and where some of us first heard the phrase “vocational awe.”<sup>13</sup> I was floored. It was the first time I felt *seen*, my sacrifices and burnout and low morale recognized. It was also the first time I’d ever come face-to-face with myself as someone who had, at least since college, fully integrated my sense of identity into my line of work. The idea that my work is not \*me\* but actually just – work, even work I enjoy – was transformative and helped guide me through the emotional rollercoaster of bureaucracy, siloism, and mistakes that took place during the IMLS TKTL grant. It helped me, very gradually, begin to recognize the need to breathe, the need to recover, both for myself and the people working beside me every day.

With our colleague and project coordinator Jimmy Zavala, we developed a cohort model that would treat students and communities as equal partners, as records-creators, and as experts. From the outset, we agreed that our focus must be on non-custodial partnerships. Our goal was to surface, or elevate, the historical records and cultural heritage of the Orange County Region for research, even materials not held by the UCI Libraries. The structure of a cohort included: a paid position within the Libraries for 10 weeks, 10 hours per week. Students selected community organizations and were grouped into teams. They were assigned readings about archives, librarianship, and ethnic studies, while rotating facilitation responsibilities. During the course of the quarter, these students also worked with our team and were mentored/coached by community-based organizational partners on specific projects *designed by the CBOs*, such as record organization, scanning photos and documents, organizing events, recording oral histories, or photographing locations and people. Throughout this process, students were asked to reflect on their experiences, and we sought feedback

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<sup>13</sup> A recording of this talk, which took place at the Pushing the Margins Symposium at UCLA on July 14, 2017, is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KqciRGBZWQ>. During the plenary, I displayed the following quote: “Libraries are just buildings. It is the people who do the work. And we need to treat these people well.” from Fobazi Ettarh. “Vocational Awe?” May 30, 2017. <https://fobaziettarh.com/2017/05/30/vocational-awe/>.



from each CBO as well. We found this was an approach that leveraged the resources of the Libraries, supported CBOs in their goals, provided students with training and knowledge, and helped build archival documentation of the region.<sup>14</sup>

Our findings reinforced what we already knew: representational belonging and self-representation are crucial elements of transforming archives and the archival field. Engagement with ethnic and community histories **is** a transformative experience. Students are records creators, memory-makers, and memory keepers for their own communities. And, above all, listening to communities, centering communities, will always be the most ethical way for academic archives to preserve and support diverse and marginalized histories.

As we progressed, I realized we were going to get stuff wrong, and that I had a lot to learn. We designed a research project to hire a project coordinator librarian, to pay students, and pay for supplies for organizations, but were discouraged from direct compensation for the community-based organizations who we were partnering with...due to lack of precedent and existing policy. The Architecting Sustainable Futures white paper, published in early 2019, reinforced the value of leveraging the resources of the university toward sustained existence and support for community archives.<sup>15</sup> The compensation of communities and community-based organizations was something we missed in our project design, so we proposed a change to our grant so that community-based organization leaders would receive an honorarium in the third year. I took note that we would need to do more to operationalize partnerships, to dedicate funding and resources long-term in very concrete ways.

We still had more work to do, especially in the ways that we developed partnerships. We started drafting memoranda of understanding, but realized that these were too formal. So we drafted partnership agreements with elements such as: how long will we partner with each other? What will the Libraries do? What will the partner org do? What will the students do, and how, and when, and where? Managing expectations on both sides meant being clear about how we make decisions, where money goes, and how we benefit from a collaboration.<sup>16</sup> We placed parameters around partnerships so that we could accomplish a goal together.

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<sup>14</sup> Audra Eagle Yun, Jimmy Zavala, Krystal Tribbett, and Thuy Vo Dang. (2020). *Transforming Knowledge*, "Transforming Libraries - Researching the Intersections of Ethnic Studies and Community Archives: Final Report." UC Irvine: Libraries. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/47c2h0dd>.

<sup>15</sup> Bergis Jules. "Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives." Shift, 2019. [https://mellon.org/media/filer\\_public/01/58/0158e4ba-28a3-458c-ba6a-de0f8b2fd855/architectingsustainablefutures-2019.pdf](https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/01/58/0158e4ba-28a3-458c-ba6a-de0f8b2fd855/architectingsustainablefutures-2019.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Templates for partnership agreements will be centralized in the forthcoming CCAP Hub and we will actively seek examples from across the US. One example is available on the OC&SEAA Partnerships page at: <https://ocseaa.lib.uci.edu/partnerships>.

As I have learned and grown from our work in community-centered archives partnerships, so too has there been an evolution in archival work on a larger scale at UCI. With our team, we have had some challenging discussions around how to make new and lasting, permanent changes to our daily work. It's pushed us to think holistically about everything we do, and recognize the real impact that applying our values can have. A few years ago, our department developed a local vision, values, and mission statement informed by the overarching organizational and library statements.<sup>17</sup> It gave us a starting point to think about the big picture: accessioning, primary source instruction, non-custodial partnerships, reparative archival description, iterative archival processing, collection development strategy, and every function is being looked at for the ways in which we can activate and act upon our values. Within a department of 10 people, we have created small functional teams, and we are making changes in our day-to-day work. One resource we've found useful has been the activities from Liberating Structures, which has free exercises and prompts. One of my favorite activities is called 15% solutions, which asks us to look at a challenge and ask: what can I do, right now, with the resources and authority I have? If I could only change 15% of my work, what would I do today?<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, there are cross-institutional ways to build and communicate values that point to *actionable* strategies, such as the University of California Heads of Special Collections' "Statement on Inclusion and Equity in Special Collections, Archives, and Distinctive Collections in the University of California Libraries."<sup>19</sup> Acknowledging absences and understanding failures in past practices is a first step toward unified commitment to change. We can come to terms with injustice and thrive - even within toxic workplaces - by fostering transparency and finding spaces where we feel affirmed and seen. Transparency is about visibility - showing the process of power, not just the decisions that are made. Each of us has some power to make change, and each of us accepts that we are learning as we go.

But where do we go from here?

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<sup>17</sup> <https://special.lib.uci.edu/about-us>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/7-15-solutions/>. Mark Matienzo, Dinah Handel, and the team from Lighting the Way led multiple meetings that incorporated Liberating Structures exercises: <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/lightingtheway>.

<sup>19</sup> Elaine Tennant, Peter Hanff, Kevin Miller, Audra Eagle Yun, Athena Jackson, Emily S. Lin, et al. (2021). "Statement on Inclusion and Equity in Special Collections, Archives, and Distinctive Collections in the University of California Libraries." UCSF: Library. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4mq1461d>

First: we have everything we need to co-create and represent archives now and for the future. We have everything we need because we have the ability to know and represent ourselves \*and\* the communities around us in this work. We do this through love, or loving-kindness.

To build a community, we come together in the spirit of love. Not romantic love, but the work of bringing generosity and a willingness to challenge others toward progress and growth that benefits us all. bell hooks talks about this definition of love in her writing and in a conversation with Thich Nhat Hanh, where she says,

Perhaps the most common false assumption about love is that love means we will not be challenged or changed. No doubt this is why people who read writing about racism, sexism, homophobia, religion, etc. that challenges their set assumptions tend to see that work as harsh rather than loving.

Of all the definitions of love that abound in our universe, a special favorite of mine is the one offered in *The Road Less Traveled* by psychoanalyst M. Scott Peck. Defining love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth,” he draws on the work of Erich Fromm to emphasize again and again that love is first and foremost exemplified by action—by practice—not solely by feeling.<sup>20</sup>

“The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing...growth.” If we bring *ourselves* to the work of archives, are willing to be vulnerable \*and\* loving, transformation is possible.

In drag culture, transformation is constant. These artists talk about the fact that we are all performing, all the time. Sometimes we perform to protect ourselves. We all know that there is “another me” beneath the professional facade, and all the versions of me are coming along for the ride.<sup>21</sup>

I mentioned the work of my team in developing a shared mission, vision, and values because it was one of the first times in my career that I had really opened myself to say, “I don’t know the best way to go. Let’s look together.” I could receive criticism – and do something about it – if I had done the work of building trust with my colleagues by doing what I said I would do, by making changes that were concrete, and by extending myself

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<sup>20</sup> bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hanh. “Building a Community of Love: bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hanh.” *Lion’s Roar*. March 24, 2017.

<https://www.lionsroar.com/bell-hooks-and-thich-nhat-hanh-on-building-a-community-of-love/>.

<sup>21</sup> “Inside the UK’s Rapidly Changing Drag Culture | Documentary.” Still Watching Netflix. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MddilSDv7Po>.

to further the growth of my colleagues as we worked together. I am continuously growing because I have opened myself to being challenged and learning from mistakes.

Every element of work, including hiring and onboarding, strategic planning, and even team building exercises can be shaped through authenticity and a willingness to shift power.

Let's talk for a moment about power in archives. We find ourselves at a pivotal moment in our field, coming up against a reckoning that nearly all of our archives were founded to preserve and uphold whiteness. A key element of this power is the power to \*possess\* material culture. So we have moved toward "decolonizing" our collections through reparative collecting, through redescription and reprocessing. But building diverse collections simply is not enough. Nancy Godoy, who leads the Community-Driven Archives program at Arizona State University, writes about *conocimiento*, or awareness, as a means for community archivists to build collective memory that heals historical trauma. She writes:

The undeniable truth is that decolonizing is an act of deep transformative love, courage, and reflection. A predominantly white profession will never decolonize archives because the foundation of most traditional repositories is rooted in white power and systemic racism. In order to truly liberate archives from oppressive theory and practice, there needs to be a redistribution of power and resources which grants marginalized people the authority to lead community-driven archives.<sup>22</sup>

Again: a redistribution of power that grants authority to marginalized people to *lead*. My colleagues and I have worked to reconcile the inherent contradictions of academic archives and community partnerships, thinking holistically about what reciprocity really means. We know our positionality within an institution. Over the past 5 years, we have developed a set of principles that guide our work, which we've called community-centered archives practice.

Community-centered archives come into being through collaborative partnerships between mainstream archival institutions and communities that are underrepresented in the historical record.<sup>23</sup> The goal is to empower communities in the process of telling and preserving their own histories, wherever that may be. In a community-centered archive partnership, academic archival institutions are:

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<sup>22</sup> Nancy L. Godoy. "Community-driven Archives: Conocimiento, Healing, and Justice." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*. 3.2 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v3i2.136>.

<sup>23</sup> These principles are published at: <https://ocseaa.lib.uci.edu/partnerships>.

#### Collaborative through shared authority

In a community-centered approach, the institution focuses on shared authority, making decisions together and respecting the value, expertise, and perspective brought to the partnership by the community.

#### Attentive to inequities reflected in archives

An institution should seek to understand how communities have been misrepresented, absent, or maligned in historical documentation.

#### Responsive to the community's needs

An institution must be flexible, adaptable, and take an iterative and ethical approach to responding to how community memory and evidence is preserved, described, and made accessible. This means being willing to bend and stretch how archival work is defined to reflect what matters to the community.

#### Engaged with the divergent priorities of communities

Community-institution partnerships must vary depending on the needs of each community, from the level of involvement by specific contributors to decisions about what archival material to work with.

Ultimately, we know that principles aren't enough. Over time, we have made progress in defining archival work in an academic setting as not only about collecting and providing access to the collections we already steward. We are letting go of *custody* as our primary reason for being.

Jarrett Drake has written extensively on the ongoing fight between Harvard's Peabody Museum and the descendants of an enslaved man named Renty and his daughter Delia, whose images appear in daguerreotypes in the Peabody's collections.<sup>24</sup> This descendant, Tamara Lanier, has proven herself as the direct descendant of Renty to be acknowledged and, ultimately, to question whether the museum has the right to keep these images, which were so obviously taken without consent. In a recent article, Drake introduces archivists to his concept of "archival dynamics," a term which "conceptualizes archives apart from their institutional instantiations and as dialectical processes that concentrate and codify power."<sup>25</sup> He outlines the need to study not only the material of archives, but the boundaries of who belongs, how we define property, the legitimization of descendants, and navigating narratives after death. What is at stake at Harvard is not a handful of daguerreotypes being repatriated. The power to *possess* has been the ultimate power of a cultural heritage institution.

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<sup>24</sup> Jarrett Drake. "A Vision of (In)Justice: Harvard Archives Bear a Strange Fruit." May 29, 2019. <https://medium.com/@jmddrake/a-vision-of-in-justice-harvard-archives-bear-a-strange-fruit-30e645643df6>

<sup>25</sup> Jarrett Martin Drake. "Blood at the Root," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 8, Article 6 (2021). <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol8/iss1/6>.

C-CAP TEACH is a 48-month initiative funded by the Mellon Foundation to reinforce the capacity and the \*responsibility\* of academic libraries to engage in ethical, reciprocal partnerships through educational experiences and other resource commitments.<sup>26</sup>

If we are to dismantle systems of oppression deeply embedded within traditional archives, we must be able to imagine possibilities not yet explored in the academic institutional setting. Community-centered archives practice (C-CAP) is a model of archival work based on institutional collaboration with community stakeholders, critical interrogation of our own collections and knowledge gaps, shared authority with communities, and flexibility in how we work with diverse groups. It consists of teaching students, archival practice, curatorial work, outreach, and everyday action that privileges memory keeping in the service of self-representation.

In the CCAP initiative, we are looking to focus on unified digital collections and archival description, whether the collection materials are “ours.” We will be providing sub-awards to other academic libraries to provide direct payments to community-based organizations and students working on partner projects. We will also be conducting assessments with the California Digital Library to better understand the contextualization of community history and ways to facilitate contributions of historical content from community-based organizations and community-based archives. Centering and listening to communities must always be the starting point.

And so, we archivists agree with the values of inclusion, of connection, of self-representation. We might even agree that it’s time to pull away from extractive, custodial thinking. We hire DEIA consultants, we may ourselves be appointed to DEI librarian positions, we post Black Lives Matter signs, we commit to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives. We know that there is a DEI industry. As an insurance diversity consultant said recently, “Everybody wants to do new things, but people don’t want to stop doing old things, [he says] ‘I’ll say, ‘You really need to look at your insurance policies and how you’re giving out rates.’ Clients will say, ‘I ain’t going to mess with that. Let’s talk about allyship. Let’s talk about white fragility — that’d be a great topic.’ ” He adds, “You can make a lot of money in diversity being abstract.”<sup>27</sup>

We are dealing with the trauma of the past two years and we are so tired. We want to change things, but there’s so much to do. We deserve to make space to care for

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<sup>26</sup> <https://sites.uci.edu/ccap>.

<sup>27</sup> Bridget Read. “Doing the Work at Work: What are companies desperate for diversity consultants actually buying?” *The Cut*. May 26, 2021. <https://www.thecut.com/article/diversity-equity-inclusion-industrial-companies.html>.

ourselves, to rest, and prepare for values-driven work. As Andrea Lemoins of the Free Library of Philadelphia says,

“The trauma that frontline library workers face existed long before now. This pandemic did what all crises do, intensify systemic oppression. [...] Nothing will change until we address the history and foundational practices of our profession. We must work to define our identity, what library work is. We must set boundaries and organize towards a just future where literacy and knowledge improve living conditions for all.”<sup>28</sup>

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Courage is necessary now. What if we stopped doing the old things? What might it mean for us to know our field’s history, acknowledge it, and release the practices that our forebears expected us to maintain? Can we love this work again?

The work begins at home, inside us, inside our workspaces, inside our institutions, inside our communities. It is uncomfortable for many of us, myself included. I want to thank the Society of California Archivists for creating space for us to grow, including active bystander training, forming a labor task force, and advancing an advocacy and public policy group. Likewise, ALA’s new core competencies include Social Justice, which shows promise to help us practice courage in our daily work, to activate ourselves and archives in relation to the world.<sup>29</sup>

In a recent interview, Tonia Sutherland talks about how the ways that archivists are trained is changing:

But I definitely do think that not only does the way we train librarians and archivists need to change, but I would say it *is* changing. I think five years ago people were absolutely shocked to hear that, in my introduction to archives classes, I wasn’t teaching Jenkinson and Schellenberg. I just don’t teach them. There are other perspectives, there are other ways to understand records, other ways to understand archives, and the role that they play in society. I mention Jenkinson and Schellenberg as one way of thinking about it, but I no longer teach that it’s *the* way. And I think increasingly that the same ship turning that we are

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<sup>28</sup> Andrea Lemoins. Twitter thread by @ALemoins, Feb. 12, 2022. <https://twitter.com/alemoins/status/1492569645777313796?s=11>.

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<https://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2021/07/ala-adopts-new-code-ethics-principle-racial-and-social-justice>.

feeling and seeing, I think that's happening in the classroom too. [...] I'm encouraged and optimistic.<sup>30</sup>

Pushing back against the original structures and changing our core competencies means building and sustaining a long-term vision – taking action done with hope. Black feminism tells us about the value of *pragmatic* hope. Tressie McMillan Cottom says pragmatic hope is “having a set of beliefs and ideas and knowing from the outset that you are going to fall short of them,’ but figuring out how to try anyway...Pragmatic hope is about translating those big ideas—human-centered, ethical, fair, just.”<sup>31</sup> We can't and will never know everything, we can't be prepared for all scenarios, and we are going to be wrong. But we are going to try like hell anyway.

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I want to close with an update on my hometown, and the reckoning and reconciliation taking place there in the face of extremism. After a local journalist wrote an in-depth piece about the lynchings and a short documentary appeared online, Black leaders in Newberry approached the mayor about creating a community conversation about race.<sup>32</sup> The racially segregated churches held a joint Sunday picnic and heard sermons about forgiveness and healing. A small group took a bus trip to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, also known as the National Lynching Memorial. Community members gathered soil from the site of the lynching, and jars of this soil are now on display at the museum. The mayor made a proclamation, the city made a public apology, and installed a historical marker where there once was none.

Patricia Hilliard-Nunn, who first began to document the memories of survivors of anti-Black violence in Newberry, passed away in 2021, but her research was not in

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<sup>30</sup> Tonia Sutherland. “It Matters Who Does This Work: An Interview with Tonia Sutherland.” By Sophia Ziegler. Special Issue, *Journal of Critical Digital Librarianship* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2021): 5-14. <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=jcdl>.

<sup>31</sup> Tressie McMillan Cottom. “Hatfield Lecture: Co-Creating a Better Future, Together.” *Lafayette News*. March 26, 2021. <https://news.lafayette.edu/2021/03/26/hatfield-lecture-co-creating-a-better-future-together/>.

<sup>32</sup> Claudia Adrien. “The Newberry Six.” *The Gainesville Sun*. September 4, 2005. <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/2005/09/04/the-newberry-six/31702953007/>. Additional writing appears in *The Gainesville Sun* and local news, including Rebecca Santana. “This Is What We Know’: Newberry Begins Reckoning Over Lynching History.” WUFT-TV PBS. September 21, 2018. <https://www.wuft.org/news/2018/09/21/this-is-what-we-know-newberry-begins-reckoning-over-lynching-history/>. A reflection by the mayor: Jordan Marlowe. “A More Perfect Union.” *FORUM Magazine*: Spring 2022 – A Joyful Noise: Celebrating the Soundtrack of Our State. Florida Humanities. <https://issuu.com/floridahumanities/docs/forum-spring2022-pages/s/15271931>.



vain.<sup>33</sup> A local author wrote a book about Newberry.<sup>34</sup> A faculty member at UF wrote a play imagining the personal stories, dreams, and humanity of Newberry's lynching victims that was sold out at the theater in Gainesville.<sup>35</sup> Dr. Marvin Dunn published a book about Black Florida history.<sup>36</sup> Rosewood approaches its 100-year anniversary and is looking to partner with Newberry on a compendium of poetry and reflections to document, to *remember*. And just this year, the School Board of Alachua County voted to incorporate the Newberry lynchings into its K-12 curriculum.<sup>37</sup> In this landscape of anti-Critical Race Theory laws, of white comfort bills, of explicit erasure of the true history, advocates and small organizations persist as they always have. As Ms. Vivian Filer said in a recent interview: "the government can censor the schools, but they can't censor me."<sup>38</sup> Remember...that the United States' first ever anti-lynching law - the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act – was signed into law in *March 2022*. And white supremacist violence persists, from Buffalo to our own archives. We -- here today, right now -- are the ones who can build a new future.

I leave with a few questions to consider as we move through this year's SCA conference. These might be prompts for discussion with others here, colleagues old and new, or just something to ponder alone. Thank you to the SCA program committee for putting these questions on giant sticky notes here in the room, and for the Jamboard. Please add your thoughts and participate however you can.

- What is your "origin story" as an archivist? How might you develop a position statement that articulates your intersectional identities, your position(s) of privilege, and helps others understand what undergirds your commitment to archival work?
- How do you bring your whole self to this work? How might you find meaning in the work without it becoming your identity?
- What "old things" can you let go of, to make room for actionable changes, space for vulnerability, and experimentation?
- From Liberating Structures: What is your 15 percent? Where do you have discretion and freedom to act? What can you do without more resources or authority? What can you do \*today\*?

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<sup>33</sup> Camila Pereira. "UF libraries display a collection of works in honor of Patricia Hilliard-Nunn's legacy." *The Independent Florida Alligator*. March 3, 2021.

<https://www.alligator.org/article/2021/03/hilliard-nunn-library-display>.

<sup>34</sup> Janis Owens, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A History of the Newberry Mass Lynching of 1916*. Virginia Beach, VA: Köehlerbooks, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> <https://thehipp.org/new-berry/>.

<sup>36</sup> Marvin Dunn. *A History of Florida: Through Black Eyes*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> "Newberry lynchings in curriculum." WUFT-TV News. February 24, 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcDpUcRcURM>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

And finally, this quote:

“The Earth is generous with us — and forgiving. We can be the same with each other. Becoming indigenous to place also means embracing its story, because the restoration of the land and the healing of our relationship mirror one another. Coming to terms with injustice is an act of liberation. By making the past visible, we can then see our way forward.”<sup>39</sup>

Archives – and archivists, wherever we may be -- play a critical role in reinforcing truth, scaffolding counter-narratives, and resisting erasure. We are all trying to work toward a better future, and that is worth doing - above all, immediately, and *always*.

Thank you.

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<sup>39</sup> Robin Kimmerer. “The Rights of the Land.” *Orion Magazine*. 2008.  
<https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-rights-of-the-land/>.