

Building Representative Community Archives: Inclusive Strategies in Practice. Edited by Hannah Leah Crummé. ALA Neal-Schuman, 2024. 288 pp. Softcover. \$64.99.

The discourse on community archives has expanded significantly over the past several decades. What began as a relatively straightforward designation, *community archives* has diversified into a range of terms, including “community-based,” “community-centered,” “community-driven,” and “community-engaged” archives. While these labels are often used interchangeably, they signal important distinctions regarding governance, ownership, institutional affiliation, and modes of participation. Taken together, this evolving terminology reflects ongoing debates within the field about who holds authority, where archives are located, how communities exercise control, and how institutions engage or absorb community archival initiatives.

Building Representative Community Archives: Inclusive Strategies in Practice primarily examines institutional archives and the ways in which they collaborate with local or historically underrepresented communities. The book is composed of 10 essay-length chapters that focus on initiatives situated within government archives, historical societies, academic research institutions, and library settings, where professional archivists work to expand representation across race, religion, sex, gender, and other axes of identity. Rather than centering independent, community-led repositories, the book foregrounds institutional efforts to engage communities through collecting, programming, description, and partnership. In doing so, it situates community archival work within formal archival infrastructures and raises important questions about governance, authority, and the extent to which inclusion within institutional settings constitutes community control.

Not all of the chapters in the book explicitly situate their projects within a clearly articulated theoretical framework. Several contributors present descriptive overviews of specific collections or initiatives, emphasizing process and implementation over conceptual grounding. Across the volume, however, one intellectual influence appears consistently: Michelle Caswell. Contributors frequently draw upon her scholarship to frame discussions of Black narrators and storytelling authority, collection development decisions, digitization practices, the relationship between history and archives, radical empathy, and the symbolic annihilation of marginalized identities. Caswell’s work functions as a shared theoretical touchstone, providing a common vocabulary through which contributors articulate the ethical and political stakes of inclusive archival practice.

Of the 10 chapters that compose the book, the editor’s coauthored contribution appears as chapter 3. In her introduction, Hannah Crummé outlines three primary aims: to examine institutional collecting efforts through case studies that highlight innovative approaches, new techniques, and the soft skills necessary to build collections; to explore archivists’ efforts to reassess and reprocess existing holdings; and to contribute to ongoing conversations about recordkeeping practices and the preservation of more inclusive historical witnesses. She encourages readers to distinguish between community-created archives, community-centered archives, and archives that merely document communities with little or no consultation. She also frames the book as a practical guide for building representative community archives.

Crummé’s coauthored chapter on partnerships with Vietnamese American communities through Lewis and Clark College’s Aubrey Watzek Library in Portland, Oregon, exemplifies

this approach. Situating the initiative within a broader national climate marked by a lack of empathy toward recent immigrant communities, the chapter describes how oral history collection and sustained relationship-building became central strategies. The work is positioned as both documentary and relational, underscoring that inclusive collecting emerges not only from technical expertise but from long-term engagement and trust.

While the chapters provide rich examples of institutional practice, the volume's organization does not fully reflect its aspiration as a guide. The chapters are arranged thematically rather than procedurally, making it difficult for readers seeking concrete implementation strategies to identify clear how-to pathways. A more explicitly structured roadmap, particularly one addressing governance frameworks, policy development, or sustainability planning, would have strengthened the book's utility as a practical manual.

The contributors represent institutions located across Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Washington, New York, Illinois, and Oregon, positioning the volume firmly within a US archival context. While this geographic range reflects regional diversity within the country, the collection remains nationally bounded. The discourse aligns primarily with US-based debates surrounding representation, inclusive collecting, and institutional reform. Less visible are international conversations, particularly those emerging from the United Kingdom, Indigenous sovereignty frameworks, or postcolonial contexts that more directly interrogate autonomy, state power, and archival sovereignty. This national framing does not diminish the book's contributions, but it shapes its conceptual horizon.

Questions of infrastructure and governance surface unevenly across the chapters. While several contributors name white supremacy as a force shaping archival silences and the marginalization of communities in the historical record, fewer examine the structural constraints of their own institutions beyond issues of fund-raising and limited resources. Governance, authority, and policy frameworks are often implied rather than explicitly analyzed.

Several chapters illuminate these tensions in productive ways. In chapter 1, Alissa Rae Funderburk interrogates the politics of transcription in oral history projects, arguing that standardized English, rooted in British colonial norms and white supremacist linguistic hierarchies, can distort or discipline Black speech, including African American Vernacular English. Her intervention foregrounds language as infrastructure and suggests that inclusive practice may require rethinking not only transcription standards but the very definition of the archival record itself.

Chapter 5, authored by Conor Casey, presents an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion model for documenting and collaborating with ethnic communities at the Labor Archives of Washington. Drawing on Caswell and Marika Cifor's concepts of radical empathy and feminist care ethics, Casey frames archival work as relational and accountable to community stakeholders, emphasizing institutional reflexivity and intentional collaboration.

Chapter 7, by Christine M. Angel and Mary Elizabeth Brown, turns to access through metadata and pedagogy. Using the case of the Scalabrinian Priests and the Center for Migration Studies, the authors describe efforts to train students in metadata creation as a

means of surfacing obscured narratives and expanding public engagement. Here, descriptive practices become a mechanism for recalibrating visibility and reshaping historical emphasis.

In chapter 10, the authors draw on Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd's definition of *community archives* as "the product of [a community's] attempts to document the history of their commonality through collection of material gathered primarily by members of the community and over whose community members exercise some level of control" (p. 213). Read against this definition, the chapters largely reflect community-embedded or institutionally hosted initiatives rather than fully community-led or community-governed models. Independent community-controlled archives are notably absent, narrowing the volume's engagement with questions of autonomy and shared authority.

The book's emphasis on inclusive collecting and relational engagement feels especially urgent in the current political climate. As public debates intensify around historical narrative, cultural funding, and institutional accountability, the sustainability of community-engaged archival initiatives becomes not merely a question of resources but of policy, governance, and institutional will. Representation alone does not secure autonomy.

Building Representative Community Archives makes a meaningful contribution to ongoing conversations about inclusive practice and institutional responsibility. It will be of particular interest to students, researchers, and professors of archival practice, as well as to memory workers seeking models of community-engaged archival activity within institutional contexts. The case studies presented in each chapter demonstrate the care, labor, and intentionality required to expand representation within established infrastructures. At the same time, the book leaves open critical questions about long-term governance, policy commitments, and structural sustainability—questions that will shape the future of community archives in the years ahead.

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