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## Review of Participatory Heritage

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Roued-Cunliffe, Henriette, and Andrea Copeland, eds. *Participatory Heritage*. London: Facet, 2017.

Community archives, diversifying the archival record, and engaging traditionally underrepresented communities are all topics receiving increased attention in the archival field today. The 2017 Society of American Archivists' Annual Meeting devoted an entire day to exploring these subjects, and recent sessions at meetings of regional archival organizations have addressed them as well. *Participatory Heritage*, edited by Henriette Roued-Cunliffe and Andrea Copeland, is an excellent resource for archivists interested in learning more about these important areas of archival work.

*Participatory Heritage* is a collection of nineteen essays that explore how people interact with the past through documents, stories, reenactments, experiential learning, oral histories, the built environment, and digital communities. Roughly half of the authors are faculty at schools of library and information science or information studies, while the rest are practitioners and researchers from museums, libraries, archives, and fields such as information technology and digital scholarship. Geographically, the projects originate from North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Asia, with urban, rural, and suburban perspectives all covered. No book can be expected to cover every angle, but it is important to acknowledge that *Participatory Heritage* does not include contributions from Latin America or Africa, and readers from the United States may be especially disappointed that it does not explore perspectives from North American indigenous or Hispanic/Latinx communities.

Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland define participatory heritage as “a space in which individuals engage in cultural activities outside of formal institutions for the purpose of knowledge sharing and co-creating with others” (xv). The heritage aspect of the concept also seems to imply that the cultural activities have some connection to the past, whether through individual remembrances, collective memory, or more traditional historical sources. However, as the editors discuss in the introduction, the volume is not intended to simply provide descriptions of participatory heritage projects. Rather, it aims to describe and analyze the interactions between participatory heritage projects and more traditional institutions in the museum, archives, library, and higher education fields.

One of the strengths of *Participatory Heritage* is the variety of experiences represented and the detailed glimpses into their projects that most authors provide. The majority of the chapters are case studies describing specific projects, although a few have a wider scope or are drawn from larger research projects. The brief chapters are generally concise and clearly written, and they often leave the reader wanting to know more about the projects they discuss. Chapters that may be of particular interest to archivists cover topics such as the archives of the African American community in Flat Rock, Georgia; the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church Archives in Indianapolis; three projects involving interactions between universities and underserved communities in the Midwest; a digital history project capturing memories surrounding a massacre of Korean refugees by American soldiers during the Korean War; an oral history digitization project in Jefferson County, Colorado; and possibilities for future uses of digital collections. These chapters are particularly successful and should be especially helpful in

large part because the authors are not afraid to discuss challenges, doubts, and aspects of their work that did not go as planned or that they wish had turned out differently. It is refreshing to read case studies where these issues are not glossed over, and also a reminder that creating meaningful collaborations between academic institutions and local communities is often a long and difficult process.

The first section, “Participants,” is intended to focus on the range of contributors to participatory heritage projects. It pays particular attention to the motivations of community members, considering why they choose to do the work they do and what they hope to get out of their projects. In many cases, creating a sense of community and connections that are not available through existing institutional structures are foremost in the minds of such participants. The chapters also cover how community members’ goals effect their interactions with institutions or differ from professional standards and best practices.

An emphasis on participants’ ideas and goals runs through the chapters in this section, which involve everything from building a community archive to participating in a Viking reenactment in Denmark, volunteering at the Australian Country Music Hall of Fame, or editing Wikipedia entries. One particularly relevant chapter for many archivists is “A Communal Rock: Sustaining a Community Archives in Flat Rock, Georgia,” where JoyEllen Freeman gives a concise overview of a community archives project. While the archive she describes functions as a way to document a community that was literally left off the map by mainstream record-keepers, it also helps to create a physical space that brings the community it documents together and “fosters solidarity and unification” (5). Today it is quite common to hear archivists from traditional academic institutions express a genuine interest in diversifying their holdings and collecting from underrepresented groups, but this chapter offers an excellent illustration of why sending records to an academic archive may not always be the best solution.

Another strong chapter in this section, “The Bethel AME Church Archive: Partners and Participants,” provides a slightly different perspective. In this case, the oldest African American church in Indianapolis was being sold and its archive had to be relocated. Andrea Copeland recounts the long and challenging process of assisting the church with locating a permanent home for its records at a mainstream cultural institution. While in this situation the archive will no longer be physically housed by the community that created it, the materials will potentially be shared with a much larger audience. Copeland honestly recounts the benefits and drawbacks to the imperfect solution that the parties arrived at.

The second section focuses on the challenges and conflicts that may occur when reconciling community ideas about history and heritage with academic and professional practices. In the first essay in the section, “Custodianship and Online Sharing in Australian Community Archives,” Courtney Ruge and colleagues discuss the reluctance that many local historical societies in Australia have for making their collections available online, even when they have the technical capability to do so. The authors express understandable concern over this attitude, and many academics and archivists would likely also advocate having as much material as possible freely available online and thus accessible to as many researchers as possible. However, some historical societies may believe that their collections serve a small, local audience and see digitization as

unnecessary or intrusive. This is a very different understanding of the purpose of an archival collection, but it should not necessarily be considered less valid.

Noah Lenstra provides a nuanced view of these often conflicting perspectives in his chapter, “Social Inequalities in the Shaping of Cultural Heritage Infrastructure.” His discussion of three community projects that he became involved in as a university professor should be of interest to archivists at academic institutions considering how they might collaborate with local communities or diversify their holdings. Like several other chapters in *Participatory Heritage*, Lenstra’s is particularly enlightening because he discusses both successes and challenges. He ultimately concludes that his most fruitful participatory heritage project involved providing technical infrastructure and support to a venture that “grew out of the interest and energies of a leader deeply embedded in her community” (102). Following the lead of the community made the undertaking more sustainable and meaningful for everyone involved.

Donghee Sinn offers another engaging account of the challenges of collaborations between academic institutions and the communities they attempt to serve in her account of the No Gun Ri Digital Archive, which aims to preserve community memories of a massacre of Korean civilians by American soldiers during the Korean War. This essay brings up a number of perceptive points that will be of interest to archivists creating digital projects, recording oral history interviews, or working with communities whose views are not represented in the mainstream narrative. Particularly thought-provoking and timely is the author’s discussion of her ethical concerns over using free or underpaid student labor to complete the project. Countless archival projects, probably including many discussed in this book, depend on this unpaid labor. However, while there are certainly active discussions in the field over unpaid internships, it is rare to see journal articles, conference presentations, or blog posts acknowledge or debate ethical considerations of the unpaid labor that made the projects they describe possible. It was wonderful to see this conversation brought up here, even though, as Sinn recognizes, there are no easy answers when funding levels do not align with project goals.

The third and final section of *Participatory Heritage* is intended to focus on solutions, although in reality these can be found across all three sections. This section has less of an emphasis on archival projects than the first two, although there is still plenty of material that might provide insight into various aspects of archivists’ work. It covers a diverse range of topics, from a description of a shared space in England related to Ethiopian heritage and the Rastafari faith to a crowd-sourcing project involving digitized postcards. Themes that come up frequently in these chapters include identifying and making use of the unique skills of everyone involved in a project; acknowledging that the professional or academic partners in an endeavor can often learn a great deal from their community partners; recognizing that many volunteers and local organizations put high value on building a sense of community through heritage projects; and the importance of clear communication between all stakeholders, particularly when their goals and priorities do not completely align.

The third section concludes with a discussion of “Open Heritage Data and APIs [Application Programming Interfaces]” by Henriette Roued-Cunliffe, which provides a thought-provoking consideration of the long-term goals of digitization projects. For many archives, particularly smaller institutions, simply getting material digitized and available online can feel like a big

accomplishment. However, Roued-Cunliffe encourages organizations participating in digitization projects to think further about the types of access they are actually providing, such as whether it is possible to make use of the documents beyond simply searching and viewing them. She argues that “separating the database (including data objects and metadata) from the interface built to search and access them” is crucial to allow for varied uses of digitized content, both now and in the future (201). Most of the chapters in this volume put much more emphasis on immediate, short-term challenges and solutions, so it is valuable to end with this broader, long-term perspective.

In sum, *Participatory Heritage* has a great deal to offer archivists. It should be of particular interest to those who seek to explore ways to engage with local communities or form partnerships with community organizations. This might mean creating collaborative projects, commemorating important events, working with volunteers, accepting new collections, promoting greater access to existing collections, or beginning to document groups that are traditionally underrepresented in institutional archives. While all of the chapters do not directly address archives, the book can be helpful in showing perspectives of related fields facing similar challenges. The willingness of many of the authors to reflect on the challenges they encountered in their own projects illustrates how there are no quick and easy solutions for creating effective partnerships between academic institutions and communities. However, the diverse projects discussed in *Participatory Heritage* also demonstrate how there is much to be gained from making these efforts. Learning from and considering the questions brought up in *Participatory Heritage* would be a great way for archivists to get involved in or rejuvenate their efforts in this significant work.