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Review of Mary Kandiuk, editor. Archives and Special Collections as Sites of Contestation. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2020.

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Mary Kandiuk, editor. *Archives and Special Collections as Sites of Contestation*. Sacramento, Calif.: Library Juice Press, 2020.

Archives and Special Collections as Sites of Contestation, an edited volume collecting seventeen essays from practitioners across the United States and Canada, contains a number of excellent, thought-provoking chapters critically evaluating how archives and special collections staff approach instruction, digital projects, cataloging, knowledge production, and ethics. Archivists, librarians, and digital humanists discuss their experiences redressing centuries of settler colonialism, white supremacy, power imbalances, racist language, and other hegemonic systems while working with collection materials, donors, users, and the public. Although the volume would be better served with a more robust editorial apparatus, that should not stop readers from engaging with individual essays.

By presenting the essays as unrelated chapters, the editor misses an opportunity to group together chapters addressing similar issues for easier engagement. That said, the individual chapters have much to offer. Several discuss critical decision-making for and ethical approaches to digitization or digital humanities projects. Several others explore practices for working with Indigenous materials in special collections. A few address cataloging choices and metadata standards, and many of the essays engage deeply with critical archival theories, critical library theories, and critical theories from other disciplines.

Digitization projects are described in six chapters. These projects were “sites of contestation” not necessarily because of conflict but because of power imbalances, knowledge gaps (usually on the part of the professionals involved), and complex issues of community trust. Authors across these chapters address a number of important topics, including ethics, contextualization of material, community outreach, community versus institutional control of material, terminology, and post-custodial issues. Reading how these librarians and archivists—from institutions with different historical relationships to involved communities—navigated the projects, framed their roles and that of their institutions, and learned from (and often ceded control to) community members should be required for archives and special collections professionals embarking on new digitization projects that involve community partners.

Gregory L. Williams and Maureen Burns contribute an incredible chapter that examines the history of Japanese American incarceration during World War II and the work of archivists at several California state universities to collect and describe material documenting that history. The resulting collaborative digital project provides an interesting model for other subjects where archival materials are scattered.¹ Williams and Burns’s discussion of descriptive terms and the ramifications of using “incarceration” rather than “internment” is a salient example of the political dynamics inherent in archivists’ descriptive language choices. Their frank discussion of the material limits of their project—in terms of funding and staff time—also makes clear how individual archives and special collections projects are tied to larger national funding and power struggles over whose histories are worthy of care.

¹ California State University Japanese American History Digitization Project, <http://csujad.com/>.

Heidi L. M. Jacobs writes about a partnership between the University of Windsor's Centre for Digital Scholarship and a local Chatham, Ontario, family who created scrapbooks preserving the history of the 1934 Chatham Coloured All-Stars baseball team. Jacobs describes how a project to digitize several family scrapbooks became a larger endeavor to digitize, contextualize, and create new scholarship and public history projects about Chatham's Black community. The university's digital resources and technical expertise, the Harding family's preservation and knowledge of their own history, and the local Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society's expertise and creativity in public history methods created an opportunity for a multifaceted digital project to document and interpret the history of Chatham's Black community through the experiences of its winning baseball team.

Similarly, Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan write about the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, an initiative of Algoma University and the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association, in their chapter "Breaking Barriers through Decolonial Community Based Archival Practice." The project described is one facet of a broader community-archiving project, but an important part of the account focuses on the online presence of the archive as a means of facilitating continuing community involvement in the archives and history of the residential school.

McCracken and Hogan's chapter reminds readers of the reality that most predominantly white educational institutions, no matter how well-meaning their staff, have histories of colonialism and racism that can be hard to shake. In these ways the archives themselves are "sites of contestation" around what knowledge or which experts are valued. Chapters in this volume that discuss Indigenous histories, forms of knowledge, and collections of material created by or about Indigenous peoples make this clear.² Peggy Keeran, Katherine Crowe, and Jennifer Bowers describe an innovative "social justice archival experience" they have developed for students at the University of Denver, one theme of which is explicitly focused on the university's "problematic relationship with Native Americans, specifically the Cheyenne and Arapaho nations" (249). The authors describe their pedagogical approaches and provide inspiration for colleagues looking to incorporate potentially controversial materials in teaching, or to use collection materials to teach about gaps in existing archival collecting or documentation.

A few other chapters provide concrete lessons or suggestions based on the authors' experiences or research. Daniel German offers a framework for thinking about when and how to restrict access to sensitive material in collections. Elizabeth Hobart discusses issues to consider when cataloging racist material and provides thoughtful examples from her own work. Interestingly, Hobart also includes examples of racist material she cataloged several years ago that she would describe differently now, after learning more about the issues at stake—a cogent reminder to readers that professionals grow, standards change, and continuous learning is part of being an information professional. Katrina Windon and Lori Birrell write about ethical considerations in deeds of gift and transfer agreements in "Signed, Sealed, Delivered (with Clarity, Context, and Patience)." They then include an annotated agreement that illustrates some of their chapter's main conclusions. Anne S. K. Tuko and Jason G. Speck describe the role of the University of Maryland archives in

² These chapters point to the strength of the inclusion of both Canadian and U.S. archivists, as the nations have different histories of colonization and domination, and certainly differ in more recent attempts to publicly wrestle with those histories and engage in restorative justice practices with Indigenous peoples.

a campus conversation about renaming the football stadium, named for a former president who opposed integrating the student body. Their suggestions for how to produce more collaborative outcomes between university archives and larger university committees and power structures will be helpful to readers at academic institutions actively engaging in critical looks at institutional history, memory, and naming practices. In 2021, the list of academic institutions and nonprofit organizations engaging in these conversations is long.

This brings me to a core critique of Kandiuk’s editorial role in this volume. There is little overall context provided for the current historical moment, both in the information professions and in the cultural realities of the United States and Canada.³ Kandiuk’s two-paragraph introductory framing states, “Librarians and archivists strive to resituate and reinterpret existing hegemonic collections and are committed to democratizing the historical record through the development of collections from a social justice perspective” (1). But she provides no larger context for that statement—no mention of recent scholarship being produced in the fields of critical archival studies, information literacy, and cataloging—and no discussion of why these particular essays and authors were chosen for the volume. A brief overview of record-keeping and colonization in North America would have helped articulate why existing collections are hegemonic, what is driving professionals to reinterpret them, and so forth. It is also worth saying here that not all librarians and archivists strive to resituate and reinterpret material they steward.

Whether a direct result of Kandiuk’s lack of contextualization or framing or not, the authors of each chapter historicize the professional moment and/or the critical rationale for their writing themselves. In some cases authors build on this context in elegant ways throughout their chapters. However, anyone reading the volume straight through may become exhausted by reading so many recaps of issues discussed in critical archival theory. A more expansive contextual introduction, outlining the past decade of scholarship and the relevant theoretical and critical issues raised for archivists and librarians who work in archives and special collections repositories, could also have served as a grounding text for the volume.

Basing an author’s perspectives and assumptions in theory is important, and a few chapters deftly incorporate theory beyond those developed in special collections—adjacent fields. Kimberley Bell and Jillian Sparks’s chapter, “Prison Sentences: Recovering the Voices of Prisoners through Exhibition, Instruction, and Outreach,” effectively uses the theories of Michel Foucault to advocate for the use of prison-created newsletters in instruction. François Dansereau’s “Men, Masculinities, and the Archives: Introducing the Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity in Archival Discourse” interrogates theorists from Max Weber to Marika Cifor and Lae’l Hughes-Watkins. Dansereau beautifully weaves complex theories into his chapter and presents these ideas with clarity.

Nearly every chapter in this volume is quite readable, and each provides excellent documentation of how archives and special collections staff have navigated, or are theorizing, projects, workplaces, collection materials, and related structures of power. While a contextual wrapper would have been helpful, Kandiuk has assembled a critical set of explorations of when and how archives and special collections serve as contested sites of meaning and knowledge. The book should be widely read by practitioners.

³ I am being broad in thinking about “historical moment” here, knowing the long timeframe of pitching, soliciting, editing, and printing such a volume.

