

## **Editors' Note: Special Section on Archival Education and Human Rights**

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In a recent article in *American Archivist*, a group of some two-dozen archival faculty and doctoral students from postgraduate programs around the world called on archival educators to develop a new educational framework that both reflects and reflects upon pluralist approaches to archival theory and practice (PACG, 2011). This article added to an ongoing conversation in archival education regarding the ethical imperative of faculty to engage students with culturally sensitive curricula and to promote a social justice agenda in and outside the classroom. At the same time, a growing body of archival studies literature has addressed the intersection of archives and human rights, interrogating the role of records and recordkeeping institutions in both facilitating human rights violations and holding oppressive regimes legally and historically accountable for such violations (Blanco-Rivera, 2009; Caswell, 2010; Harris, 2002, 2011; Jimerson, 2010). This special section of *InterActions* brings together these two streams of archival thought in order to explicate the increasing importance placed on human rights and social justice in archival education.

Three significant contributions to this discussion are featured here. First, we are honored to feature commentary on human rights and archives by one of the field's most influential thinkers, Verne Harris. In "Nelson Mandela, Memory, and the Work of Justice," Harris reminds us that our ethical obligations as memory workers are never finished. This featured commentary was initially presented as the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Alan Paton Lecture organized by the Alan Paton Centre & Struggle Archives at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Reflecting on archives and memory in post-apartheid South Africa, Harris weaves together deconstructionist theory, descriptions of anti-apartheid struggles, and decades of professional experience to create a complexly nuanced understanding of archival ethics. By asking a series of probing questions to himself and his readers, Harris demonstrates critical self-reflection as a mode of critical inquiry. He simultaneously challenges us to remain ever vigilant against meta-narratives (even those of social justice and reconciliation) and inspires us to strengthen our commitment to welcoming the stranger into our archives, our classrooms, and our research agendas.

In "Implementing a Social Justice Framework in an Introduction to Archives Course: Lessons from Both Sides of the Classroom," archival educator Michelle Caswell and her students, Giso Broman, Jennifer Kirmer, Laura Martin, and Nathan Sowry, reflect on their experiences teaching and learning about archives and human rights. Caswell shows how social justice concepts can be integrated in virtually every aspect of archival education by incorporating human

rights case studies and addressing ethical issues in basic lessons on provenance, access, and description in an introductory course on archival theory and practice. In their responses, Broman, Kirmer, Martin, and Sowry reveal how students might engage with the complexities of social justice and respond to new encounters with their ethical obligations as professional archivists in training. The juxtaposition of an educator's intentions and methods of instruction with students' self-observations seeks to underscore the importance of student voices and participation as an integral component in the future transformations of archival pedagogy in light of social justice issues.

Finally, in "Silence, Accessibility, and Reading against the Grain: Examining Voices of the Marginalized in the India Office Records," Nathan Sowry raises the specter of silence embedded in colonial records. Through a careful application of postcolonial theory to archival practice, Sowry suggests new ways that archivists might approach these difficult collections in order to give voice to the subaltern narratives contained within. Being silenced by colonizers does not require colonial subjects to remain silent in postcolonial histories, Sowry argues. For archivists, ethically grounded international preservation and digitization partnerships present new possibilities for exposing a plurality of perspectives previously confined to the sidelines of history. This contribution, originally written for the introductory archives course described in the article by Caswell et al., also serves as a testament to how students can contribute research on archival ethics.

We hope this trio of articles at the nexus of archival education, research, and practice inspires readers to rethink their own approaches to social justice and memory work. And as Harris reminds us, we must carefully and diligently tend to this call to justice as our collective endeavor.

## References

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