



A More Complete Record: The Case for Archival Partnerships

The Radcliffe Workshop on Technology & Archival Processing

Summary and Takeaway

Thursday, April 12
Knafel Center, Radcliffe Institute | **Public**

3:00-4:30 Scholars Report on Research Experience | *Panel Discussion*

Moderator: **A'lelia Bundles**, journalist and author of *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*

- **Garrett Felber**, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Mississippi and Visiting Scholar in the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University
- **Valerie Boyd**, Charlayne Hunter-Gault Professor of Journalism and Director of MFA Program in Narrative Nonfiction, University of Georgia; author of *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*
- **Anastasia Curwood**, Associate Professor, Director, African American & Africana Studies, University of Kentucky

SUMMARY

Scholars discussed their experiences conducting research in archives of all sizes, topic areas, backgrounds, and levels of funding, across the country. They all described the extraordinary support and dedication they have received from archival staff —particularly at HBCUs— and expressed how critical this level of dedication is to the success of their research. Researchers did share the impacts of limited financial resources experienced by some institutions on their research, including sometimes diminishing the accessibility of certain materials or limiting reading room hours. More abundant financial resources can also impact the collections acquisition process, helping collections to be processed much more quickly and easily, and allowing institutions to be able to pay for an individual's papers. These factors can impact a potential donor's decision-making in terms of where to donate their papers, alongside other factors such as historical or contextual affinity with a particular archive, or which existing collections their papers may be "in conversation" with. The panelists also discussed the need for

scholars to see archival staff as true partners in their research—engaging them in conversations about how the collections are being used, which can provide mutual benefit to all. Relatedly, diversity of archival staff is crucial in order for staff to understand the diverse collections they may be processing, as well as to build trust within the communities they are working in.

TAKEAWAY

Scholars rely heavily on archives and archival staff in their research, and many spend years traveling all over the country and visiting many institutions, in order to trace particular histories. Financial resources can have a significant impact on a scholar's experience and access conducting research in a particular archive, as well as on a potential donor's decision of where to donate their papers. Though HBCUs and other institutions have incredible resources within their collections, they may not have sufficient staff or funding to process them in a timely manner, preventing them from being shared with the greatest number of researchers possible. Given this financial inequity experienced by archives, potential donors who are able to might consider instead of asking for money to donate their papers, giving funds to that archive in order for their papers to be processed. Another suggestion involved creating shared archival consortia that could share resources to ensure collections are processed in a timely manner.

4:30-5:00 Questions & Answers

- **Julieanna Richardson**, Founder and Executive Director of The History Makers

SUMMARY

Richardson discussed the development of The HistoryMakers, which is the nation's largest African American video oral history collection—10,000 hours strong, and having raised \$17 million. Richardson founded the organization based on her grave concern that significant 20th and 19th century African-American history will be lost because many PoC have no plans to preserve their papers.

Richardson utilized her skills in creating partnerships to enable the enormous success of this collection. While she did share some negative experiences of approaching PWIs who did not have knowledge about or place value on African-American collections, she also stated that her organization would not be in existence without three key partnerships. These institutions, Carnegie Mellon University, the Library of Congress, and the Center for Research Libraries have worked with the HistoryMakers out of a deep commitment to make the collection accessible, rather than out of any self-interest.

She also urged archivists not to be an insular group, but to integrate themselves into larger communities—educating the public about why archives are so valuable. One potential avenue for mutual benefit, for example, is for well-resourced universities with diversity problems to partner with lesser-resourced archives who could “become the answer to the diversity issue.”