



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*

1:00-1:15 **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

- **Sarah Thomas**, Vice President for the Harvard Library and University Librarian, Roy E. Larsen Librarian for the Faculty and Arts and Sciences

1:15-2:45 **The Past is Present | *Keynote Conversation***

- **Craig Wilder**, Barton L. Weller Professor of History, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- **Beverly Guy-Sheftall**, Chair of Women's Research & Resource Centers, Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women's Studies, Spelman College

SUMMARY

The two experts discussed the challenges faced by both PWIs and HBCUs in confronting their own, sometimes uncomfortable histories, while at the same time arguing for the necessity of doing so in order to build true partnerships. Though there is fear about what institutional archives may reveal, archivists and students can play an important role as activists in revealing historical truths. PWIs, in particular, must confront their histories of slavery and racism in order to realize a true commitment to diversity. While elite institutions often do not want to atone for their history, restorative justice is needed in order to build trust and partnership. Wilder stated that PWIs often use PoC to “advertise our goodness,” but that if HBCUs are still struggling, PWI’s commitments to diversity and equal collaboration ring hollow.

At the same time, relationships between PWIs and HBCUs should not be a form of reparation but should be based on equality and mutual benefit. Guy-Sheftall commented on the nature of various “resources” held by institutions, pointing out that while many HBCUs do encounter limited funding priority placed on

archives, the materials they contain are incredibly rich and diverse and should not be discounted. She also raised the importance of addressing issues of gender and sexuality alongside race. There is often a silence surrounding these histories, particularly in African-American communities.

TAKEAWAY

Confronting our own histories, honestly and without fear of what they may contain, is a crucial step to overcoming mistrust among institutions and communities, and building true partnerships. PWIs need to first actively learn about and confront their histories of slavery, racism and inequality in order to move work forward on diversity and partnership. Secondly, they must approach the work of both diversity and partnerships with HBCUs not from a standpoint of self-benefit and cosmetic improvement, but of mutual benefit and respect, and with a deep commitment to transforming inequities within higher education. Archives are key to these efforts, as they hold the power to reveal historical truths, and scholars, archivists and students hold a vital role in uncovering these truths in order to catalyze transformative change.