

FORUM

With the exception of editing for conformity to capitalization, punctuation, and citation style, letters to the Forum are published verbatim.

To the Editor

The debate between Greene¹ and Jimerson² (and Caswell³) was a good starting point on the subject. But rather than quibble with the points made, I thought I'd comment on an issue *not* raised.

First, full disclosure. I'm a partisan archivist who simultaneously wears several hats, including a corporate archives job and a decidedly noncorporate public museum job. This is a second career, and my first exposure to the politics of the field was Sanford Berman's essential critique of Library of Congress Subject Headings. I thought, great, some good minds and big hearts here.

But my reluctant observation from over fourteen years in the profession is that exhorting archivists to take up the torch of social justice won't make much of a difference. Smart, committed, and capable people, yes, but I believe that few work in archives to change the world. I've found very few political allies in the field, and even fewer in the professional associations.

I've been part of a Progressive Archivists listserv within SAA since 2008, and it bumps along with almost no member traffic. After Jimerson's *Archives Power* came out in 2010, Kate Theimer started what I saw as a noble effort to invigorate the debate—an online book discussion group. Initial membership was 80–80!—but chapter by chapter, members and conversation dwindled to less than a handful. “Lurkers” may all have their reasons, but the net conclusion I draw is that this is not a profession of activists.

I've made my peace with that. I'm happy to jump into a good fight (e.g., *The American Archivist's* “Sun Mad” poster cover [Fall/Winter 2003] or defense of Nicholson Baker's *Double Fold*) and engage in private discussions, but I'm not expecting my brother and sister archivists to agree about the merits of politically informed and active archival craft. All I can do is publicize that path and hope they do the right thing when push comes to shove.

Lincoln Cushing
Archivist and author
www.docspopuli.org

NOTES

¹ Mark A. Greene, “A Critique of Social Justice as an Archival Imperative: What Is It We're Doing That's All That Important?” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (2013): 302–34.

² Randall C. Jimerson, “Archivists and Social Responsibility: A Response to Mark Greene,” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (2013): 335–45.

³ Michelle Caswell, “Not Just Between Us: A Riposte to Mark Green,” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (2013): 605–607.