

⁹ National Library of Medicine, History of Medicine Division, Theresa MacPhail, *The Evolution of Viral Networks: H1N1, Ebola, and Zika* (lecture webcast, 2018), <https://videocast.nih.gov/watch=26977>, captured at <https://perma.cc/F9FJ-5FFW>.

¹⁰ Theresa MacPhail, *The Viral Network: A Pathography of the H1N1 Influenza Pandemic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing

By Robert A. Caro. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019. 231 pp. Softcover and EPUB.
Softcover, \$16.00, EPUB, \$11.99. Softcover ISBN 978-0-5930-8191-4;
EPUB ISBN 978-0-5256-5635-7.

Robert A. Caro's *Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing* offers a glimpse into one acclaimed author's research and writing process. Of interest to archivists are Caro's recollections of doing research in a number of repositories and of conducting scores of oral history interviews. While not a "must read" for members of the profession, this book is well written and entertaining. More important, it provides some insight into how seasoned researchers use our materials and into the delights and frustrations those researchers encounter.

This book contains edited excerpts from articles and books Caro has written and chapters he wrote specifically for this volume. He reflects on his long career as a journalist and historian. His stint at *Newsday* in Long Island honed his skills as an investigative reporter. Journalism fed his passion "to explain how things really worked and to explain those workings" (p. 30), and it sparked his fascination with political power and with those who wield it.

For Caro, biographies are the way to cultivate that fascination. "From the very start," he says, biographies permitted him to explore the times of his subjects and write about "the great forces that molded those times—particularly the force that is political power" (p. 3). His first book, *The Power Broker* (1974), concerned Robert Moses, the urban planner who shaped much of the infrastructural landscape of New York City and its environs. That book, Caro explains, demonstrates how Moses browbeat politicians, colluded with robber barons, pushed small landowners off their property, and destroyed neighborhoods—all to make room for the roads, bridges, and parks built under his direction. Caro's next project, to which he devoted most of his life as an author, was a series of works about US president Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ). *The Path to Power* (1982), *Means of Ascent* (1990), *Master of the Senate* (2002), and *Passage of Power* (2012), and a forthcoming volume on the election of 1964 and the Great Society explore LBJ and the nuances of political power.

More than simply a list of publications, Caro's book is a meditation on his approach to his work. Impressive—and staggering—are the number of archival

repositories visited, the number of hours spent in the New York Public Library, and the number and breadth of interviews conducted. Even more impressive is Caro's eagerness to immerse himself in the lives of—and to give voice to—the ordinary people so deeply affected by the decisions of the powerful. For example, he and his wife relocated for several months to the Hill Country of Texas, both to get a feel for the place where LBJ grew up and to earn the trust of those who had known the future president as a child. Caro's approach to interviewing involves not only cultivating trust, but also embracing awkward pauses: "silence is the weapon, silence and people's need to fill it" (p. 137). And we learn about writing. Drafts (in longhand), revisions, and revisions of revisions bespeak Caro's devotion to finding the right word, the right rhythm, and the right imagery.

Of special interest to archivists are Caro's anecdotes about his early encounters with source materials. Some of those encounters required him to have an "in," tipoff, or other lead. He consulted many of those sources not in archival repositories, but in personal offices or quasi-secret storage rooms. Working alone one Saturday in the office at *Newsday*, Caro took a call from a Federal Aviation Administration official who offered him the opportunity for a private viewing of some files from the agency. Those files gave Caro the scoop on a current controversy *Newsday* was following. Later, when Caro was working on *The Power Broker* and was denied access to Robert Moses's papers, a professional contact procured keys to a New York City Park District room. That room housed carbon copies of Moses's memoranda from his time as park commissioner.

With such tipoffs, Caro was lucky, but he made his own luck. He did exhaustive research for days, weeks, and months in archives. He encountered, for example, a collection of interviews conducted in the 1950s by the Women's City Club in New York. Those interviews helped him track down tenants displaced by one of Robert Moses's highway projects. Another example: going through correspondence in the LBJ Library revealed clues that helped Caro, after much follow-up work, unearth the donors who funded LBJ's early congressional career.

Caro's recollections of research at the LBJ Library are illuminating. After the staff gave him a tour of the storage room for the LBJ papers, he quickly realized he could not heed the advice of his former editor at *Newsday* to "turn every page" (p. 11). And so (the archivist is pleased to know), he reads the finding aids! We get a patron's-eye view of Caro piecing together information about the records. He learned of the principle of original order. Materials that Caro would have expected to find in LBJ's congressional files are instead found in a distinct grouping LBJ's staff had created for documents that were "historically valuable" or that "dealt with persons with whom [LBJ] was closely associated" (quoted from the finding aid on p. 85).

Caro alludes to conflict between himself and some of the repositories he visited. He hints at occasional violations of patron privacy. One reason Robert Moses eventually granted him interviews was that Caro spent “a lot of time going through documents . . . in the New York State Archives in Albany, and nothing that went on in Albany escaped [Moses’s] notice” (pp. 23–24). That statement may be hyperbole to emphasize the breadth of Moses’s power, but if it is not hyperbole, it would be disturbing. Another example is from the LBJ Library. One day, Caro was in the reading room researching *The Path to Power*, his first book on the president. “The telephone on the archivist’s desk in the Reading Room rang, and the archivist said the call was for me” (p. 131). The call was from two women who wished to speak with Caro. They had somehow learned he was writing a book on LBJ, and they had information for him. Today, such a phone call would (or should) raise immediate ethical concerns for the reference archivist. Did Caro authorize archivists at the library to take calls and identify him? Were norms different then? We do not know from Caro’s account.

Caro’s relationship with the LBJ Library has apparently been rocky. We learn that, after he published *The Path to Power*, “Johnson’s associates and the Johnson Library were busy attacking it” (p. 100). Caro declines to give details. One wonders what might prompt a repository to make the ethically fraught decision to “attack” one of its patron’s books. At any rate, it is probably a credit to the professionalism of both Caro and the LBJ Library staff that he has continued to use that library’s holdings for subsequent books on Johnson.

Missing from this book, as archivists might say, are reflections on archival materials as a whole. Caro—unsurprisingly, given his projects and his background as an investigative journalist—treats repositories and the archives they manage as stores of information to be mined. With large holdings, like presidential papers, he notes a nagging concern. The holdings are too large. “You hope you’re seeing everything that really matters, but you always have this feeling, What’s in the rest?” (p. 194). But what does the arrangement of, say, the LBJ papers say about LBJ or his staff? Had Caro considered that question, he might supplement his understanding of the president.

Caro plans to write “a longer, full-length memoir” (p. xxiii). Archivists might hope that memoir will elaborate on what, from their vantage point, remains underexplored in the book before us. How have Caro’s research habits changed now that (most?) finding aids and (some) materials are online? How have his experiences evolved in tandem with repositories’ increasing reliance on archivists trained in library and information science instead of “archives adjacent” disciplines like history? What, if any, is his advice to a newbie who might wish to use archives for the first time? Or, what is his advice for archivists to make his and others’ work easier and more productive?

Asking Caro to address those questions is asking him to write the book archivists would like and not necessarily the book he has in mind. He is not writing for archivists per se. But the current book might teach archivists a little—and maybe more than a little—about how seasoned researchers experience what archivists have to offer. And the writing is so enjoyable that it is worth a look.

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University of Illinois at Chicago

Responsible Operations: Data Science, Machine Learning, and AI in Libraries

By Thomas Padilla. Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2019. 35 pp. Open Access PDF.

ISBN 978-1-55653-151-4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25333/xk7z-9g97>.

Published in December 2019, *Responsible Operations: Data Science, Machine Learning, and AI in Libraries* is a new Research Position Paper from OCLC that is particularly prescient in the light of recent prominence in the mainstream media of the activism by the Black Lives Matter movement to end the kind of structural inequalities perpetuated by data-driven policies. Indeed, decisions based on flawed data science further uphold structural inequalities. This paper addresses just one area of library and archival practice where the need for change to tackle structural inequalities is urgent.

We live in a data-driven world, and, whether we like it or not, we are affected by hidden algorithms that drive our internet search engines and social media, as well as feed the decision-making processes of policy makers, insurance providers, law enforcement agencies, and so on. In her 2016 book, *Weapons of Math Destruction*,¹ Cathy O’Neil discussed a wide variety of misuses and abuses of data to drive decision-making and policy that affect the lives of millions of people across the world. She discussed the ways insurance companies, probation services, and police authorities use algorithms to make decisions about people and communities that reinforce and uphold structural inequalities linked to race, gender, and residential location, among other factors. The algorithms that drive data analysis are opaque and closed to scrutiny. No opportunities exist to provide feedback on results to create a force for good rather than a machine that reinforces inequalities and the status quo. Safiya Umoja Noble’s 2018 *Algorithms of Oppression*² took this further to highlight the damaging effects of the racist and sexist substructures of search engines (and their results). She further drew a direct link between the historical roots of library cataloging practice and the development of data science and search engines: “Information organization is a