

## Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice

Edited by David A. Wallace, Wendy M. Duff, Renée Saucier, and Andrew Flinn.

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The publication of *Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice* occurs at a time of multiple imperatives: climate change, a global pandemic, social movements against sex- and gender-based violence, numerous refugee crises, the Black Lives Matter movement, and, in Canada, a national reckoning on the many unanswered Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the confirmation of unmarked burials of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children at now closed state and church-operated residential schools.<sup>1</sup> This time of crisis and transformation is a lens through which to consider the interplay of archives and social justice and its manifestations. Building on 2013's "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation"<sup>2</sup> and other studies, the editors and contributors of *Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice* provide analyses and examples of archives' and recordkeeping's contradictory roles in contributing to, and countering, injustices. The authors trouble and motivate, and the case studies underline ways in which archives act as agents of oppression, but also are activated for social justice, evoking alternative futures where they advance change and support Howard Zinn's values of "peace, equality, and justice" (p. vii).

Given the subject matter of this book under review, it is important for me to begin with a land and language acknowledgment and critical self-location: as an archivist at the University of Victoria and a settler of Scottish and Irish descent in what colonizing governments named British Columbia, I acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples in whose traditional territory I am privileged to live and work, and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples, living and ancestors, whose relationships with the land continue today.

*Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice's* editors have, through research, professional practice, and community involvement, considered archives' roles in social justice. Professor and dean of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information Studies, Wendy M. Duff's research areas include archival access, community engagement, social media, archives user experiences, and archives and special collections assessment, including the Mellon-funded Archival Metrics project.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Flinn is a reader in archival studies and oral history, departmental director of research, and Arts and Humanities Faculty deputy vice-dean for research (impact) at University College, London. His research interests include community-based archives, participatory archives formation, public history, and the effects of Freedom of Information legislation on access

to records.<sup>4</sup> Renée Saucier has a graduate degree in information studies specializing in archives and records management, held the inaugural Penny Rubinoff Fellowship at the Ontario Jewish Archives' Blankstein Family Heritage Centre, and volunteers at the ArQuives—Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives in Toronto. Her research interests include community archives as well as web and social media archiving. David A. Wallace has published and presented on topics such as recordkeeping and accountability, government secrecy, and archival social justice; his consultancy work includes the South African History Archive's Freedom of Information Programme and Stories for Hope (an intergenerational storytelling NGO in Rwanda). Wallace holds the appointment of clinical associate professor at the University of Michigan's School of Information.

In addition to the four editor-contributors, sixteen individuals contribute to the text's contextualizing chapters and eight case studies. The editors have organized the volume into two sections: the first leads the reader from the volume's rationale, historical and contemporary perspectives on archival social justice, and methodologies for research on the social impact of archives, to the second part, consisting of a preface, eight case studies, and a conclusion. As someone involved in acquisition initiatives with activist communities and allied faculty members before much professional writing or discussion existed on the topic in my professional community, I found the structure and content of these early chapters a helpful resource within which to situate some of these initiatives, with concepts, terms, and methodological frameworks set out in detail. The notes and reference sections for each chapter are useful guides to further reading.

Section 1 consists of Saucier and Wallace's introduction on archival social justice, which describes the development of research, key terms, and synopses of the case studies, "with attention to the range of archival social justice impacts uncovered by their contributors" (p. 3). This is followed by Wallace's chapter, "Defining the Relationship Between Archives and Social Justice," and Duff and Michelle Caswell's "Methodologies for Archival Impact Studies." Wallace's chapter sets up Duff and Caswell's analysis of methodologies by supplying a detailed overview of multidisciplinary perspectives on social justice, a definition of the term, and a consideration of ethics in the decisions to take up archival social justice mandates. Wallace's definition of social justice—in summary—strives for the common good through full human recognition; fair and just (re-)distribution of power (and other benefits and burdens); full and equal participation in political and decision-making processes, education, and services; acknowledgment and remedy of historical injustices; and it works against systemic and institutionalized oppression and domination (p. 30). The definition is a political position and prompts the question: are we individually and collectively ready

and/or able to carry the social justice imperative into our professional lives (if we haven't already)?

Duff and Caswell's chapter concerns itself with the history of evaluation research, alternative research models, and a literature summary of types of archival public service impacts, including educational, economic, social, and affective (or emotional). The authors also note the critiques of neoliberal impact measures prevalent in library and information studies, as well as culturally responsive evaluation techniques and studies that consider the value of narrative methodologies to counter quantitative evaluation.

Section 2 consists of a brief preface by Saucier explaining the patterns across, and categorizations of, the commissioned case studies. These include struggles to access and activate records created by oppressive regimes, the use of records in the pursuit of transitional justice,<sup>5</sup> and the undertakings of community-based activist archivists to create autonomous, or counter, archives. Saucier notes that most of the studies "illuminate the paradoxes of trying to foment social justice with records and recordkeeping systems that are themselves both the residue and the tools of injustice and oppression" (p. 71). The studies animate the concepts and methodologies of archival social justice set out in the proceeding chapters. Broadly described, the case studies cover the following issues: colonial recordkeeping and land restitution in South Africa; colonial recordkeeping, archival custody, and Indigenous land title in British Columbia, Canada; archives and redress for Australian Care Leavers; archives and redress for victims of the Hillsborough stadium disaster, United Kingdom; access to the records of Chilean truth commissions; activist archives and antigentrification campaigns in London, UK; shared heritage, lesbian and gay archives, and the ArQuives—Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives; coconstruction and the Archive of Mental Health Recovery Stories, UK; and archival agency and Palestinian refugee autonomous archives.

While there is insufficient space here for consideration of all the case studies, I would like to mention one, for its emotional impact (on this reviewer) and its analysis of archival social justice impacts: "'All I Want To Know Is Who I Am': Archival Justice for Australian Care Leavers" by Joanne Evans, Frank Golding, Cate O'Neill, and Rachel Tropea. Evans et al. document the redress campaign for Care Leavers, the survivors of Australia's Children's Homes. The authors provide an overview of the archival and recordkeeping community's response to the recommendations of inquiries and commissions, and posit that significant transformation must occur for archivists and communities to be participatory agents in archives that promote identity, memory, and accountability (p. 113). The authors provide useful examples of how archivists and historians have worked with records holders and the Care Leaver community to present descriptive information, including information on records absences, in more

sensitive ways (p. 114). The case study also measures the social justice impact of the government's Find and Connect Program, whose activities were intended to mitigate some of the significant obstacles Care Leavers have faced in accessing records (p. 105). Evans et al. compare the program's activities to Barbara Klugman's social justice values: "resources should be distributed so that everyone can live a decent life; human beings all have equal human rights and should be recognized in all of their diversity; and all people should be represented and be able to advocate on their own behalf" (p. 117). Like other case studies in this volume, "'All I Want To Know Is Who I Am'" does not present an easy solution to the Care Leavers' struggle, but, as the authors and editors note, the arc of history bends toward justice.

*Archives, Recordkeeping, and Social Justice* is a key resource for thinking about and engaging with concepts and practices that support archival social justice. It is primarily an academic work, intended for an academic audience, and, as a volume in the series *Studies in Archives*, it is positioned to be a textbook for archival and information studies courses and used in other disciplines concerned with the influence of archives in society. Additionally, its chapters and case studies can be paired with complementary writings and other resources produced by activist communities.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Courtney Dickson and Bridgette Watson, "Remains of 215 Children Found Buried at Former B.C. Residential School, First Nation Says," CBC News, May 27, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-emlúps-te-secwépemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778>, captured at <https://perma.cc/HB36-Z9U5>.
- <sup>2</sup> Wendy Duff, Andrew Flinn, Davis A. Wallace, and Karen Emily Suurtamm, "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation," *Archival Science* 1, no. 4 (2013): 317–48.
- <sup>3</sup> Wendy Duff, "Faculty Profile," University of Toronto Faculty of Information, <https://ischool.utoronto.ca/profile/wendy-duff>, captured at <https://perma.cc/5GUC-KRHF>.
- <sup>4</sup> Andrew Flinn, "Academic and Research Staff Profile," Department of Information Studies, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/information-studies/andrew-flinn>, captured at <https://perma.cc/5ST3-T8D4>.
- <sup>5</sup> Transitional justice refers to the ways countries redress historical injustices, either formally through punishment, restitution, and compensation, or informally through acknowledgment, commemoration, apology, and forgiveness gestures (p. 5).