

# Imagining Archival Futures

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As we write this introduction in late summer of 2024, presidential politics dominate the headlines, not just in the United States, but internationally as well. According to the Associated Press, more than fifty presidential or legislative elections affecting over half of the global population were planned for 2024. Calls for change have been heard around the world, and candidates everywhere have laid out their visions for the future.<sup>2</sup>

Calls for change and discussions about the future have also been major themes in the archival literature—not just this year but for many years, as we have seen in the latest iteration of our Intergenerational Conversations series, which focuses on Society of American Archivists (SAA) presidential addresses.<sup>3</sup> Transforming archives from privileged institutions for scholars to spaces that are welcoming to all users has been a key theme of many addresses. As Dr. Meredith R. Evans, SAA’s seventy-fourth president, stated in 2020:

Thinking about the future—in terms of people, procedures, and practice—is an opportunity to honor those whose voices and lives have been denied, lost, or ignored through our work. We can confront and maybe even correct the skewed systems and conditions in which we live, work, and play until these silenced voices receive the respect and inherent dignity we all rightly deserve.<sup>4</sup>

Two years later, Courtney Chartier, SAA’s seventy-sixth president, asked SAA members, “Can you envision archival futures as inseparable from the practice of care?” She shared a vision of archives as places “where we are truly connected to our communities in such ways that we are crucial, that we support those navigating harm, that we create community, that we are beacons for those who are isolated, and where we accept folx as they are.”<sup>5</sup> Terry Baxter, SAA’s seventy-seventh president, also centered his address on reimagining archival spaces, stating that “the more we can transform, day after day, whatever archival setting in which we currently exist into a community archive, the closer we move to a world of joy, love, solidarity, and someday, liberation.”<sup>6</sup>

The six publications featured in this issue highlight some of the ways archivists and allied professionals are fulfilling these calls to action. Two compilations—*New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*, reviewed by Kate Burns,

and *Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies*, reviewed by Drew Russell—describe how oral histories and other archival sources can challenge dominant narratives about LGBTQ+ communities, examining how archivists gather and present these perspectives. Two publications focus on particular types of documentary sources for amplifying marginalized voices: *Black Archives: A Photographic Celebration of Black Life*, reviewed by Harvey Long, explores personal archiving and memory keeping within Black communities through the lens of the family photo album, while *Journalism History and Digital Archives*, reviewed by Kailyn Slater, explores the potential of new technologies for unlocking underrepresented voices from historical news media. Finally, two publications reflect on the ways our professional practices can exclude certain voices and experiences or uplift them. *ALA Editions Special Reports: Narratives of (Dis)enfranchisement: Reckoning with the History of Libraries and the Black and African American Experience*, reviewed by Adam Stokes, examines how libraries have historically excluded Black Americans and how systematic racism continues to impact BIPOC library patrons and users. *The Unexpected in Oral History: Case Studies of Surprising Interviews*, reviewed by Jenifer Monger, revisits surprising, imperfect oral history experiences to explore how interviewers encourage or discourage individuals in sharing their stories.

In the words of SAA's thirty-ninth president, David B. Gracy II, these works together demonstrate that “our future is now.”<sup>7</sup> The work we do today—from building collections that reflect the diversity of human experience to building relationships within and across communities of practice—is helping to build the archives of tomorrow.

## On the Reviews Portal

(Published between April 2024 and September 2024)

### INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Buchanan, Rose, and Stephanie Luke. “In Review: Year One of Intergenerational Conversations.” Intergenerational Conversations series. April 2, 2024. <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2024/04/02/in-review-year-one-of-intergenerational-conversations>.

Buchanan, Rose, and Stephanie Luke. “Intergenerational Conversations 2024: SAA Presidential Addresses.” Intergenerational Conversations series. April 9, 2024. <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2024/04/09/intergenerational-conversations-2024-saa-presidential-addresses>.

- Kuecker, Elliott. "Trudy Peterson's Speculation on the Textual in Archives in a Changing Literacy Landscape." *Intergenerational Conversations* series. May 24, 2024. <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2024/05/24/trudy-petersons-speculation-on-the-textual-in-archives-in-a-changing-literacy-landscape>.
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## REVIEWS

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- Monger, Jenifer. Review of *Ghosts of Archive: Deconstructive Intersectionality and Praxis* by Verne Harris. August 7, 2024. <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2024/08/07/ghosts-of-archive-deconstructive-intersectionality-and-praxis>.
- Sternberger, Katy. Review of *Disaster Planning for Special Libraries* by Guy Robertson and *The Disaster Planning Handbook for Libraries* by Mary Grace Flaherty. April 26, 2024. <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2024/04/26/disaster-planning>.
- Tharp, Gregory K. Review of *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*. July 18, 2024. <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2024/07/18/dictionary-of-archives-terminology>.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All views expressed in this essay are the authors' own. They do not represent the views of the authors' institutions nor of any agency or office of the US government.
- <sup>2</sup> "25 Elections in 2024 that Could Change the World," Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/25-elections-in-2024-that-could-change-the-world>.
- <sup>3</sup> Rose Buchanan and Stephanie Luke, "Intergenerational Conversations 2024: SAA Presidential Addresses," Intergenerational Conversations series, April 9, 2024, <https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2024/04/09/intergenerational-conversations-2024-saa-presidential-addresses>.
- <sup>4</sup> Meredith R. Evans, "WE Are SAA," *American Archivist* 84, no. 1 (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-84.1.7>.
- <sup>5</sup> Courtney Chartier, "Show? To Who?," *American Archivist* 86, no. 1 (2023): 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-86.1.7>.
- <sup>6</sup> Terry Baxter, "Lovers in a Dangerous Time: Archives, Archivists, and Community," *American Archivist* 87, no. 1 (2024): 17, <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-87.1.9>.
- <sup>7</sup> David B. Gracy II, "Our Future Is Now," *American Archivist* 48, no. 1 (1985): 12–21, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.48.1.4p700782677307t3>.