

Uncovering the Gaps: Addressing the Misrepresentation of Marginalized Communities in Archives and Special Collections

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Introduction:

Archives and Special Collections are an essential part of history, specifically when it comes to the preservation of historical materials. However, it is worth noting that marginalized communities aren't often included in these collections and are at times even hidden. The purpose of this research is to highlight the misrepresentation and/or underrepresentation that has occurred in archival institutions when it comes to marginalized communities. The question that I want to explore within my research is, "how do archival practices and institutional biases contribute to the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of marginalized communities?" I would also like to explore what can be done to ensure that marginalized groups are being represented and that their histories are accurately being recorded in an equitable and inclusive manner. When thinking about my target audience, I would like this research to bring these issues to the forefront of archival education.

Historical Context of Archival Exclusion and Bias:

When we analyze the history of archives, we can quickly see that it hasn't always been a welcoming space to marginalized communities. The exclusion of marginalized communities in archives is rooted in the systemic social, institutionalized, and political structures. Daniel (2013) highlights North American archives and examines how ethnicity and immigration have been framed through the lens of white narratives. This framing that occurs oftentimes silences the

experiences of those who are marginalized. Neal (1996) explores how the profession is mostly homogeneous and that it lacks diversity, which leads to a lack of sensitivity when it comes to the needs and perspectives of marginalized communities. Similar to Neal, Ramirez (2015) critiques how whiteness has become the standard when it comes to the archival profession. Ramirez explains that this standard leads to the erasure of nonwhite voices in archival collections. As a result, we can see the archives perpetuate the unequal power dynamics that can be categorized in broader societal structures.

Critical Race Theory and the Archival Profession:

An important aspect of understanding the biases that occur in the archival profession is Critical Race Theory (CRT). As discussed by Dunbar (2006), CRT is important because it can help identify and raise social and professional consciousness of implicit bias. CRT can provide archivists a lens where they can explore and examine the ways that race, power, and privilege influences the archives. Highlighting implicit biases in archival work with CRT can encourage archivists to acknowledge that perhaps their own privileges affect the collection and preservation of historical materials. Having this awareness is crucial for fostering a more inclusive field.

Marginalized Communities and the Archives:

Maliniemi (2009) examined in their article the situation of the Sami and Kven people in Norway. In their article they highlighted that the Sami and Kven people were oftentimes invisible in public records. There were archival materials that were poorly cataloged, misidentified, or even

ignored altogether. Examples like these are important to have because it highlights how situations like these limit the potential for these communities to be properly represented when it comes to historical narratives.

Now, when it comes to Black American history, Sutherland (2017) pointed to the importance of how archives can contribute to the transitional and restorative justice for Black Americans.

Sutherland emphasizes that the archives is often centered in whiteness, and the article particularly focuses on lynchings, which have been historically underdocumented. The archival silences around violent histories such as lynchings perpetuates harm and it also further marginalizes black communities. Sutherland calls for archival “amnesty” to help foster healing and justice within the black community.

Strategies to Address the Misrepresentation/Underrepresentation:

To address the misrepresentation and underrepresentation that occurs in the archives, archivists must begin advocating for more inclusive archival practices. Ramirez (2009) discusses how archivists can in a more effective manner document latino/a/e histories within the United States by recognizing the fluidity and complexity of latine identities. Acknowledging the complex and fluid nature of these identities can help archivists avoid the oversimplification of the histories and it ensures that their voices are being heard.

Now, when we think about improving the archives by correcting the historical imbalances that have occurred, I would say that it is important to include marginalized groups in the involvement

of archival decision-making. Neal (1996) suggests that diversifying the archival profession as a whole is an important aspect to ensuring that marginalized voices are not only respected but also included and accurately represented.

Research Objectives:

By conducting my research, I want to find ways that the archival profession can become a welcoming space for all. Above, I've conducted a brief literature review, which will help me with the next process in my research. If I had a bit more time with this research, I would include interviews and focus groups with archivists that focus on archives, diversity, and inclusion. Having these interviews and focus groups could help me gain insight into the issues that still occur and it could help with the ongoing efforts to address these issues. I would conduct data analysis to identify recurring themes related to bias in archival institutions. I also would utilize CRT principles to analyze how race, privilege, and power influences the representation of marginalized communities within the archives. Additionally, I would propose solutions and recommendations based on the finding and research.

Conclusion:

The underrepresentation and misrepresentation of marginalized communities in archival institutions is an issue that stems from historical biases and institutional power dynamics. To ensure that the archives accurately reflect the diverse histories of these communities, it is important that archivists acknowledge the implicit biases that shape archival practices. For

archivists to be able to represent marginalized voices equitably and accurately it is imperative that the field embraces the idea of diversifying the field and incorporating critical race theory. As archival education continues, I think that it is important to keep these issues at the forefront of the discourse, which can ultimately lead to the fostering of a more inclusive profession.

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