

#ArchivesSoWhite in the Words of Jarrett Drake

*I&A Research Teams (<https://issuesandadvocacy.wordpress.com/research-teams/>) are groups of dedicated volunteers who monitor breaking news and delve into ongoing topics affecting archives and the archival profession. Under the leadership of the I&A Steering Committee, the Research Teams compile their findings into Research Posts (<https://issuesandadvocacy.wordpress.com/category/research-post/>) for the I&A blog. Each Research Post offers a summary and coverage of an issue. This Research Post comes from **On-Call Research Team #1**, which is mobilized to investigate issues as they arise.*

Please be aware that the sources cited have not been vetted and do not indicate an official stance of SAA or the Issues and Advocacy Roundtable.

Due to the amount of information Research Team #1 gathered, this will be a 4-part series, with the Intro & Bibliography (<https://issuesandadvocacy.wordpress.com/2016/04/18/archivessowhite-intro-bibliography/>) and then interviews with Jarrett Drake, Samantha Winn (<https://issuesandadvocacy.wordpress.com/2016/04/20/archivessowhite-in-the-words-of-samantha-winn/>), and Ariel Schudson (<https://issuesandadvocacy.wordpress.com/2016/04/21/archivessowhite-in-the-words-of-ariel-schudson/>).

Jarrett M. Drake is the Digital Archivist at the Princeton University Archives, where his current responsibilities entail describing born-digital archival collections, managing the Digital Curation Program, and coordinating the Archiving Student Activism at Princeton (ASAP) initiative. He is also one of the organizers and an advisory archivist of A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland, an independent community-based archive in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, that collects, preserves, and provide access to the stories, memories, and accounts of police violence as experienced or observed by Cleveland citizens.

What does # ArchivesSoWhite mean to you?

This hashtag, which I spawned from the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag, recognizes that the whiteness and white supremacy laced throughout Hollywood is also laced throughout the (US) archival field. The first blockbuster film, DW Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, is an homage to the lost cause and racial terror. The first state archival repositories in the US emerged in the deep south, primarily as a way to help preserve the memory of the lost cause and memorialize Confederate veterans. This inextricable link between film making and archive making rests on the normalization of whiteness and masculinity, and to a further extent the maintenance of patriarchy. Much like the Academy Awards, which fail repeatedly to honor and recognize the contributions and successes of non-white people, archives also uphold and validate whiteness through their appraisal and descriptive practices.

What conversations do you wish to hear archivists having, and where? Better yet, what action do you want archivists to be taking?

I'm not sure conversations are what archivists need. Archivists need to begin taking action, preferably beyond our walls and beyond our professional bounds. Archivists need to partner with scholars in ethnic studies programs, such as Black Studies, Latino Studies, or Asian American Studies. To make our work attuned to the struggles facing people at the intersection of race/ethnicity/gender, we also should partner with Women's/Gender Studies scholars, and in particular those studying and writing about black feminism. I think our profession turns to itself to have conversations, which is a big problem given how overwhelmingly white and middle class our field is. We need fewer conversations amongst ourselves, and we need more action with other professions and disciplines.

In what moment did it dawn on you that archives had failed diversity and inclusion, or did you always see this enormous gap/lack in the profession?

I think I saw it before it dawned on me per se; I don't recall one specific moment. The failure of our field has ripple effects. This failure impacts what gets printed in middle and high school textbooks. This failure impacts what gets exhibited at libraries and museums. This failure impacts what gets produced in films. To the extent that whiteness and masculinity are historically venerated, I've always seen the gap, even when I didn't know the reason. But now I know the reasons and I see them up close and personal in my daily work and in the professional conferences I attend.

What would you like the archives, and the archivists, of the future to be? What actions do you see helping the field move on that direction?

I want the field of archives to be critical, ethical, and responsible. I want us to challenge power and authority, not merely acquiesce to it. I want us to be transparent about the forces that shape our work and stop pretending that the colonialism and imperialism of the American state don't greatly impact the operation of most archival repositories. We profess, ostensibly, that our field is free of these things, but this is demonstrably false. Until we change that dynamic, we should be forthcoming about it. I want us to be responsible to the people, and not to the state. The state != the people. Currently, archives serve the state, broadly defined as the government and those with the means to influence the government. We need to put the people first. That's what responsible archives look like to me.

What readings (up to 3) do you recommend to archivists who need to up their knowledge around archives and race?

This is so hard, if not unfair!

1) *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (<http://www.amazon.com/Silencing-Past-Power-Production-History/dp/0807043117>) by Michel-Rolph Trouillot.

2) "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," by Verne Harris

3) "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," by Mario Ramirez.

I recognize the limitations in only listing works by men, and thus I am part of the problem. I expect (hope) someone critiques my choices because they reflect the failing of intersectional thinking in our field. We all have to do better, myself included.

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