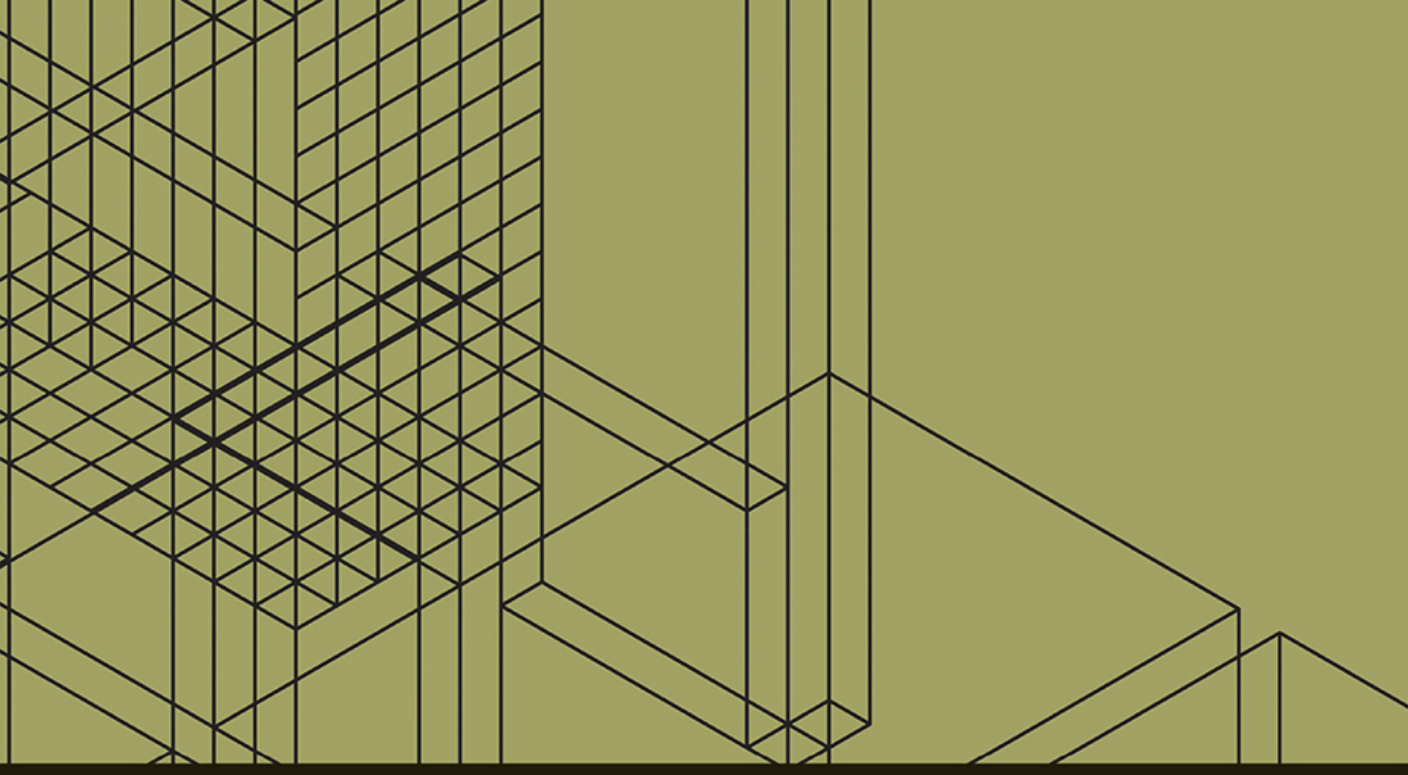
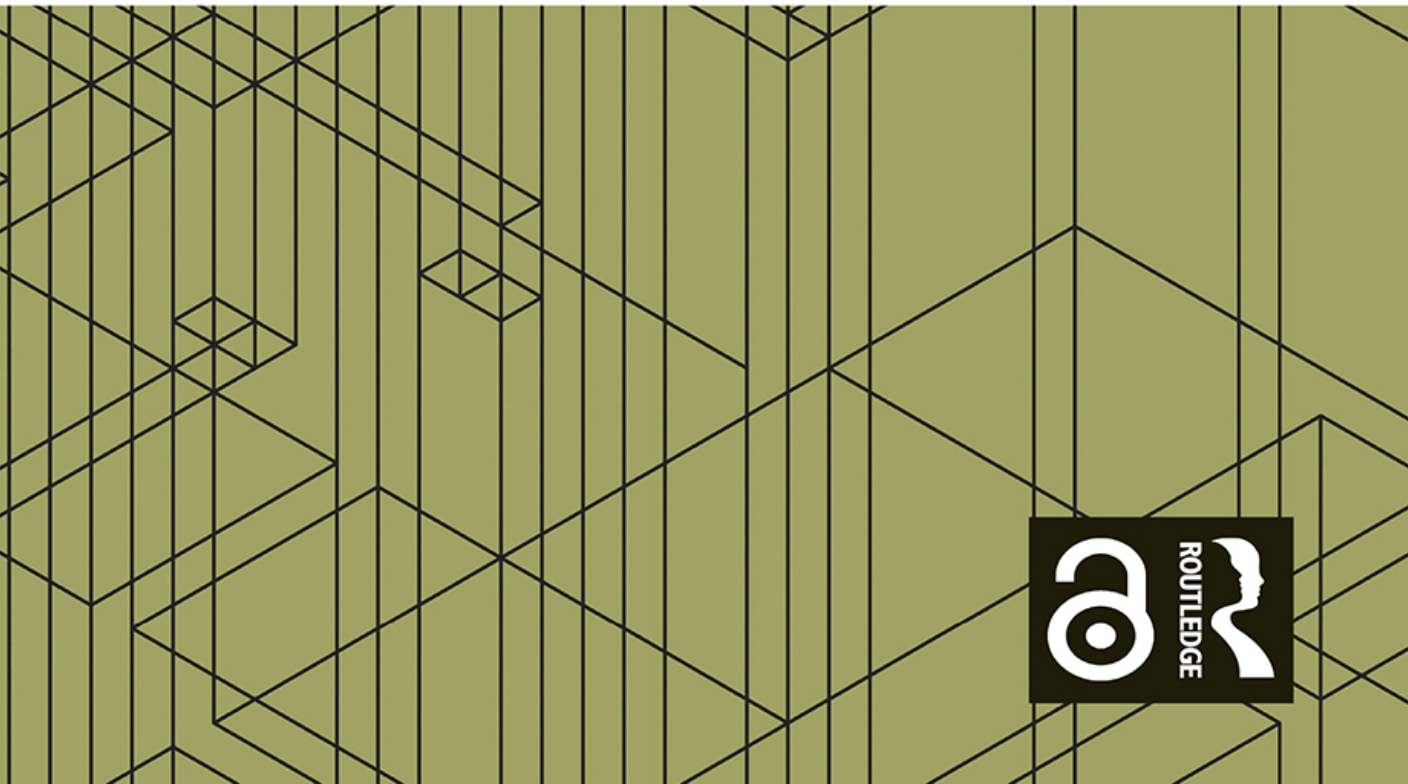


Routledge Studies in Archives

URGENT ARCHIVES

ENACTING LIBERATORY MEMORY WORK

Michelle Caswell



Urgent Archives

Urgent Archives argues that archivists can and should do more to disrupt white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy beyond the standard liberal archival solutions of more diverse collecting and more inclusive description.

Grounded in the emerging field of critical archival studies, this book uncovers how dominant Western archival theories and practices are oppressive by design, while looking toward the radical politics of community archives to envision new liberatory theories and practices. Based on more than a decade of ethnography at community archives sites including the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), the book explores how members of minoritized communities activate records to build solidarities across and within communities, trouble linear progress narratives, and disrupt cycles of oppression. Caswell explores the temporal, representational, and material aspects of liberatory memory work, arguing that archival disruptions in time and space should be neither about the past nor the future, but about the liberatory affects and effects of memory work in the present.

Urgent Archives extends the theoretical range of critical archival studies and provides a new framework for archivists looking to transform their practices. The book should also be of interest to scholars of archival studies, museum studies, public history, memory studies, gender and ethnic studies, and digital humanities.

Michelle Caswell is an Associate Professor in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the co-founder of the South Asian American Digital Archive.

Routledge Studies in Archives
Series Editor: James Lowry

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Urgent Archives
Enacting Liberatory Memory Work
Michelle Caswell

Urgent Archives

Enacting Liberatory Memory Work

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-42727-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-00027-5 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-00135-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003001355

Typeset in Bembo
by SPi Global, India

In memory of
Allison Boucher Krebs (1951–2013)
and
Doria Dee Johnson (1961–2018)

May I always live up to their lessons.

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Series introduction

Series Editor: James Lowry

Routledge Studies in Archives publishes new research in archival studies. Recognizing the imperative for archival work in support of memory, identity construction, social justice, accountability, legal rights, and historical understanding, the series extends the disciplinary boundaries of archival studies. The works in this series illustrate how archival studies intersects with the concerns and methods of, and is increasingly intellectually in conversation with, other fields.

Bringing together scholarship from diverse academic and cultural traditions and presenting the work of emerging and established scholars side by side, the series promotes the exploration of the intellectual history of archival science, the internationalization of archival discourse, and the building of new archival theory. It sees the archival in personal, economic, and political activity, historically and digitally situated cultures, subcultures and movements, technical and socio-technical systems, technological and infrastructural developments and in many other places.

Archival studies brings an historical perspective and unique expertise in records creation, management and sustainability to questions, problems and data challenges that lie at the heart of our knowledge about and ability to tackle some of the most difficult dilemmas facing the world today, such as climate change, mass migration, and disinformation. *Routledge Studies in Archives* is a platform for this work.

Acknowledgments

In the middle of writing this book, COVID-19 hit. I found myself grounded at home in Los Angeles, taking care of my five-year-old son, as my husband, who is an emergency physician, worked long and stressful hours. I wrote whenever I could, as my son slept, eked out online kindergarten assignments, watched television, and hung out with a co-quarantined friend (thank you Eunsong Kim!). I still can't believe I finished it. I am in awe of my fellow mama academics (Safiya Noble, Miriam Posner, Jennifer Douglas, Dorothy Fujita-Rony, and Sumayya Ahmed among them) who manage to work wonders in the middle of systems that devalue care work.

While this book was finished in months of stolen moments, the ideas in it had been brewing for over a decade. It is hard to imagine now that when I first entered library and information studies, the academic field of archival studies and the archival profession discounted the legitimacy of community archives as objects of study and as memory institutions. I am forever indebted to a group of scholars and archivists who have challenged these ideas, expanded my own worldview, and enriched the field immeasurably. Foremost among them is Samip Mallick, who is the most gentle, gracious, loyal, and tenacious friend and collaborator at the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA). Without him, I would literally have nothing to write about. Never deterred by the current state of practice or accepting of notions of technical impossibility, Samip's dedication and vision have taught me over the past 15 years that another archival world is possible. Thank you, Samip, for giving life to my work, and for being always so supportive and gracious. Being a part of SAADA has kept me from entering the pit of despair, especially since the pandemic hit.

My two oldest friends in the world happen to be in the field. Without Emily Drabinski, I never would have found LIS. Thank you, Emily, always you with your structural analysis, always pushing me to be rigorous and critical, always with a sense of humor. Sumayya Ahmed and I have been friends since high school. She has been telling me to "keep hope alive" for three decades now. One day I'll figure out if she is being sarcastic or not.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the archivists, volunteers, and users of community archives who enabled me and my students to conduct focus groups and interviews at their sites. I am forever in awe of the work of Thuy Vo Dang, Walt

Meyer, Rosa Peña, Jen LaBarbera, and Michael Okamura. I am also grateful to Bergis Jules and Gabriel Solis, with whom it is a privilege to think through the work of community archives. I am inspired by a group of archivists who work daily to transform oppressive systems: Audra Eagle Yun, Athena Jackson, Kelly Besser, T-Kay Sangwand, Dalena Hunter, Lizeth Ramirez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O'Neill, Holly Smith, Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Courtney Dean, Skyla Hearn, Stacie Williams, Sam Winn, Eira Tansey, and Michaela Hart. And thank you to Jennie Freeburg who is always willing to talk it over and drink it out with me.

My students, current and former, push me in the best possible way. It has been an honor to teach and learn from my doctoral advisees: Marika Cifor, Mario H. Ramirez, Gracen Brilmyer, Joyce Gabiola, Oraison Larmon, and Ayantu Tibeso. Together with MLIS students Noah Geraci, Alda Allina Migoni, Jimmy Zavala, and Jessica Tai, their work at UCLA's Community Archives Lab (https://communityarchiveslab.ucla.edu/) has fundamentally shaped this book, and me, for the better. Much gratitude is also due to Evan Tucker, who originally described the Dhillonn materials discussed in the introduction.

Financial support from the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has made the work of the UCLA Community Archives Lab possible over the years. I am particularly grateful to Patricia Hswe and the Public Knowledge team at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for taking community archives practice and research seriously for the past 5 years. Gratitude is also due to the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Global Leadership Academy of the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) which funded the 2016 Dialogue Series that brought us together, and introduced me to the incomparable Doria Dee Johnson, to whom this book is dedicated.

The community of scholars brought together by the Archival Education and Research Initiative (AERI) has been an incredible network of support and inspiration. Particular thanks to Jamie A. Lee, Tonia Sutherland, Itza Carbajal, JJ Ghaddar, Jennifer Douglas, and Rebecka Sheffield, who have kept me intellectually and emotionally nourished despite it all. Much gratitude is especially reserved for Jamie A. Lee for commenting on an earlier draft of this book.

Two archival thinkers push and pull me toward better, more liberatory work. Jarrett Drake's brilliance, candor, and commitment to liberation are daily sources of inspiration. Verne Harris created the intellectual conditions in which this work is possible. A particular note of gratitude is due to Verne, who not only provided the liberatory memory work framing, and whose fearless brilliance has forever changed the trajectory of archives, but who has also commiserated and conspired with me over the state of archival studies for almost a decade now. I always envision Jarrett and Verne as my first critical readers.

My feminist girl gang in UCLA's Information Studies Department—Safiya Noble, Miriam Posner, and Sarah T. Roberts—provided me with all the moral support, intellectual generosity, and comic relief a girl could ever need. Together we got this.

To my life partner, Tomer Begaz, who did his fair share of childcare and housework while I was writing this book (even while being on the frontlines of a

pandemic), and who is a constant source of unconditional love: thank you. Much gratitude for reminding me daily, in the words of Toni Morrison, that I am not my work.

And finally, for my son Lev, should that he read about the world's many injustices in archives, and not in headlines, nor, even worse, perpetrate, witness, or fall victim to them firsthand. You and your generation deserve more from us.

Introduction

Community archives: assimilation, integration, or resistance?

"Do We Assimilate, Do We Integrate, Do We Resist?"

– Zain Alam

The footage is so achingly beautiful you could cry. In full vivid color, a handsome young Indian man smiles at his bride, a young white woman in a gold and red sari that matches his turban. They steal glances while a judge performs the wedding ceremony, they flirtatiously feed each other cake, they crack up laughing while opening gifts. Not only are they a gorgeous couple, they are clearly, hopelessly, in love. The home movie is silent, but if we listen closely, we can almost hear their laughter (Figure 0.1).[1]

This film's beauty belies the racist context of the society in which it was created. Filmed in Norman, Oklahoma, in 1959, the wedding of Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn and Dorothy Dhillonn would be illegal for another 8 years, when the 1967 Loving v. Virginia decision legalized consensual interracial marriage in the United States.

After the 1959 wedding, 12 years of the couple's daily lives together unfold over three reels: first one baby, then a second; the man, now clean-shaven and devoid of turban, having fun with the children; the children, celebrating birthdays, learning to walk, taking baths, enjoying a Coke, sharing an ice cream cone, dressing up like cowboys.[2] We see what we previously thought was impossible on screen—everyday footage of South Asian American family life in middle America in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Historians have long known that there was a small but thriving Indian community in the United States in the early 1900s. But, in 1923, a US Supreme Court decision denaturalized Indian immigrants based on racial grounds, barring them from citizenship and causing many in the once-burgeoning community to return to India. Many scholars used to think of the time between 1946, when the Luce-Cellar Act imposed a restrictive 100-person-a-year quota on Indian immigration, and 1965, when the US Immigration Act was passed, repealing the quota, as being a kind of dead space for the community, with little cultural and political activity.[3] This film is evidence of a largely unknown continuity of South Asian American stories.

The footage came to me, as most records come to archivists, through a combination of random luck and years of outreach. I am the co-founder of the South Asian

DOI: 10.4324/9781003001355-1

Figure 0.1 Still image from footage of the wedding of Sharanjit Singh and Dorothy Dhillonn, 1959. Image appears courtesy of Bibi Dhillonn and the South Asian American Digital Archive.

American Digital Archive (SAADA), an online community-based archives that documents and shares the histories of immigrants from South Asia to the United States and their descendants. I am also a professor of archival studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In Spring 2016, one of my students in UCLA's media archives program was working on digitizing some home movie reels for a class project that she thought might be of interest to SAADA. When she sent me a link to the digitized footage, my eyes widened, my jaw dropped, and I started jumping up and down.

I immediately sent the footage to SAADA's Executive Director and co-founder, Samip Mallick. Mallick described,

> When I first saw the home movies I was amazed. It felt like I was glimpsing a piece of history that I never thought I would see. I actually hadn't thought that there would be home movies from the South Asian community from that period in time…[4]

For Mallick, the film resonated on both a personal and social level. "There is something so relatable in the mundane experiences recorded in these home movies. Yet, these images are incredibly important, to the South Asian American community and its history, but our awareness and knowledge of the diversity of the American experience as well," he said.

We both knew instantly, and viscerally, that we wanted to acquire this record for SAADA. With the help of my students, we soon tracked down its owner. The home movies belonged to Bibi Dhillonn, an administrator at UCLA. Her father, Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn, came to the United States from India to pursue master's degrees

in chemical engineering and mathematics at the University of Oklahoma. In 1958, Sharanjit met Dorothy, who was also studying at the University of Oklahoma. After their 1959 wedding, the couple had four children, soon moving from Oklahoma to rural California, where Sharanjit got a job as a chemical engineer at Borax. After a racist attack at a gas station, Sharanjit cut his hair and beard and stopped wearing the customary Sikh turban. He was an avid fan of film and photography and an amateur filmmaker.

His daughter, Bibi Dhillonn, had been looking for a way to digitize the three home movie reels her father had left behind in order to share them with her siblings, and reached out to UCLA's Film and Television Department, which referred her to my department's media archives program. The student assigned to the project also knew about SAADA's mission and scope, as I am constantly talking about the organization in the courses I teach.

Soon after the acquisition of the digitized Dhillonn home movies, SAADA launched the "Where We Belong: Artists in the Archive" project with a grant from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. The funding enabled the organization to launch a discovery process whereby we selected five South Asian American artists working across a range of media and genres to create new works of art inspired by records in SAADA. One of the explicit goals of the project was to create new artistic representations of South Asian Americans that combat historical erasure and re-contextualize the community's century-old history in light of contemporary racism and xenophobia.

In October 2016, at the initial meeting of the cohort of artists participating in the project, Mallick and I first met the musician Zain Alam in person. Alam, an artist who composes under the recording project Humeysha, was at that time a graduate student at Harvard and had previously worked as an oral historian at the 1947 Partition Archive, an organization that documents the Partition of South Asia. Alam spoke eloquently about the impact of everyday stories on larger historical narratives and the importance of robust and accurate representations of South Asian American Muslims, particularly in light of post-9/11 Islamophobia. When Alam mentioned he might be interested in composing a score to accompany moving images, Mallick and I instantly thought he would be a perfect match for the Dhillonn footage.

When Mallick and I showed Alam the footage, he too had a visceral reaction. "The moment I watched these videos I knew they were what I had to work on," Alam said.

> It almost didn't seem real. Like it was a miracle that this [marriage] could have happened so long ago. But it wasn't a 'miracle.' It could also be described as just a very normal American community in Oklahoma where two people fell in love.[5]

Alam further described:

> My first reaction to the Dhillonn footage was of surprise. To this day I think most South Asian Americans are surprised when they see a marriage that crosses ethno-religious lines, or other norms like class and sexuality. Many who've been in such relationships (including myself) have dreaded the moment

> they will have to reveal their true selves to their families, and wonder when this will no longer be the case. To see such a wedding unfolding – with both white and Punjabi families present – in warm and hazy video tones was my first surprise. I couldn't look away from it the moment I began watching… it had set back my mental clock – in a visceral, deeply felt way.[6]

But even more than that instant, affective connection, what Alam calls, "the archival spark," the Dhillonn home movies raised deeply personal and political questions for Alam. He said:

> …when I came across the [Dhillonn] videos, it put a lot of things into perspective for me. I grew up in Kennesaw, Georgia post-9/11. Seeing the videos made me realize – not only are we not the first, but there were other people even deeper in the heartland of America who were having the experience of being American for the first time and asking, *"Do we assimilate, do we integrate, do we resist?"* It really put things into context, especially given what was happening politically at the time that I discovered the videos. There's such a long arc of history there, both personal and on a much larger scale…[7]

Alam quickly got to work composing a score for the silent Dhillonn footage and ultimately decided to remix excerpts of the historic home movies with contemporary news footage covering white supremacist violence against Sikhs and South Asian Americans writ large. The resulting nine-minute multimedia piece, "Lavaan," juxtaposes a moving homage to Sharanjit and Dorothy Dhillonn's marriage and the striking beauty of everyday family life in the 1950s and 1960s with the current rise in hate crimes and xenophobia, suggesting an almost wistful longing to return to an imagined time of intimacy and security.[8]

Yet, in Alam's video remix and score, even the seeming domestic bliss of the Dhillonn footage is haunted by the unspoken violence of Sharanjit's assimilation, his transformation from someone whose turban instantly marked him as "other" in 1959 to a clean-shaven man dressed in western clothes in later footage. Violence that is merely hinted at in the home movie footage rages out of control in CNN headlines running across the bottom of the screen at the end of Alam's piece. We move from romance, to humor, to sorrow, to outrage, all the while questioning linear narratives of racial progress. The piece not only "sets back [our] mental clock" (to use Alam's phrase) in terms of when we date South Asian immigration to the United States, but also in terms of reminding us that the themes of personal love and political violence intersect and cross across space and time in complicated, circular routes. There is no clear linear path set forth here from a couple's love to a fully functioning racially just society.

The personal becomes a metaphor for the political in "Lavaan." We see the Dhillonn children take their first unsure steps, fall down, and get back up again. Alam explained:

> To me, the greater narrative of learning to walk, getting up and falling back down again connected heavily with present moments where the Sikh community has been targeted since 9/11.... It's easy for us to say we've progressed so much since the 1950s, but often it feels like we're taking two to three steps forward and then six steps back. And maybe in some places like Norman, Oklahoma, maybe there were aspects that were better [for] immigrants, before people got caught up to this degree of national xenophobia that can now catch fire so quickly on social media and spread.[9]

Mallick concurred. "In some ways, 'Lavaan' is exploring this promise of a multicultural and pluralistic America that has not been kept," he said.[10]

In Alam's piece, the quotidian Dhillonn footage takes on a visceral, haunting beauty. Alam described his motivations:

> I wanted to ask of their world questions for my own world. How one feels when you see the image of a child falling down but getting back up over and over again. This poetry that comes through the specifics of the American everyday: guns, Coca Cola, and ice cream. Objects that speak to each and every one of us in related but different ways. Or the hats that Sharanjit's son falls in love with and puts on his father's head over and over again. How paradise-like India looks, the place they left behind but visit again. How much it resembles the yard in which the two girls are swinging, back and forth, wearing traditional Indian *kurtas*. All of that footage of India comes towards the end of the home videos. There is an internal circularity, a logic to life, travel, the stories we tell ourselves, and I felt that SAADA's footage of the Dhillons already had those essentials in place.[11]

The repetition of the images—a child falling down and getting up, a child swinging back and forth, a child placing a hat on his father's head and it falling off, over and over again, conveys a circular temporality, events repeating themselves again and again. We also see footage of a family trip back to India, a return to Sharanjit's country of origin, briefly, for vacation, and then the footage continues back in the United States. These small personal acts mimic the larger repetition of history unfolding later in Alam's piece, the seemingly never-ending stream of headlines announcing new waves of violence against South Asian Americans, the emboldened waves of racist attacks post-9/11, and again post Trump's election. What we see is not a progress narrative where society gets less racist over time culminating in a harmonious multiracial America, but a cyclical repetition of oppression in which a minoritized community is doomed to suffer the repeated consequences of white supremacist violence.

When Alam presented the piece at an April 2017 SAADA event in Philadelphia, its impact was palpable. A room full of more than 100 people, mostly second generation South Asian Americans, stared raptly at the screen, some visibly moved to tears. The room erupted into applause when the piece was over, and audience members engaged Alam in a lively discussion that was not only personal, but deeply

political. Some expressed the surprise and joy of seeing South Asian Americans represented at that time period, a shock of self-recognition where they did not expect it. Others moved beyond the joy of representation toward expressions of anger, stories of their own experiences with racism, and questions about how best to mobilize against such repeated violence.

SAADA aimed to expand this discussion beyond the more than 100 people in the room that day. To that end, the organization created a viewing and discussion guide, the "Where We Belong Toolkit," so that community members could hold viewings of the artists' projects in their own homes with their friends and families, sparking conversation and action.[12] In the section on "Lavaan," the kit asks the question: "How does the connection between these home videos from the 1950s and anti-Sikh violence today make you feel?"[13] Through the many-layered activation of the Dhillonn footage, SAADA encourages community members to draw circles between past and present, personal and political, and emotional and historical.

Alam's piece had the same almost-dizzying effect on Dhillonn's daughters. In a conversation I moderated between Alam, Dorothy Dhillonn, and her daughters Bibi Dhillonn and Ravi Dhillonn, they described watching "Lavaan" as "exciting," "beautiful," "deeply, deeply moving," and "spiritual." When asked by Alam if it produced an experience of "disembodiment" to see old family movies juxtaposed with recent news footage of hate crimes, Dhillon's daughter Ravi responded, "the politicization produced the very opposite feeling. I felt it was closer to home. I felt it was more personal."[14] She then recounted stories about racism her Indian cousins experienced when traveling throughout the United States. For her, Alam's reinterpretation of her family's own home movies enabled her to draw through-lines between the personal and the political. As Alam described, both the original footage and its reinterpretation in "Lavaan" enable us "to see ourselves in a new light, despite differences of time and space." "What more can you ask for?" Alam rhetorically asked.[15]

At their best, that is what archives empower people to do—see themselves in a new light across space and time. At their very best, archives then catalyze this new self-reflection into action, motivating users into activism beyond their personal contexts. Using Kathy Carbone's term, Alam transformed the Dhillonn footage into a "moving record," that is, a record that moves us as secondary users as it circulates through Alam's activation in his remixed piece.[16] As the initial record travels through space and time via "Lavaan," it gets activated and reactivated, contextualized and recontextualized, creating a new record with each viewing, catalyzing limitless visceral and political responses.

Most importantly, the film *moves* us. First, there is the initial shock of representation in the face of the erasure of South Asian Americans from archives. In previous work, I've used the terms "symbolic annihilation" to describe the affective impact of being ignored, misrepresented, or underrepresented in archives and "representational belonging" to describe the feeling of complex and nuanced representation after such erasure.[17] Community archives, I have argued, counter symbolic annihilation by catalyzing representational belonging in minoritized communities. But the Dhillonn home movies and Alam's reuse and remixing of them move us beyond

the affective impact of representational belonging, toward a deeper understanding of our current political moment. That understanding gets us one step closer to action.

The questions Alam raised by way of the Dhillonn footage—"Do we assimilate, do we integrate, do we resist?"—are questions central to the work of community archives like SAADA. This book contends that if community archives are to fulfill their liberatory potential they must be activated for resistance rather than assimilation or integration into the mainstream. As such, community-based memory workers must go beyond the recuperation of minoritized histories, however important, to catalyze those histories for liberation. The aspects and aims of liberatory memory work are the subjects of this book.

Locating SAADA, locating myself

Like many archivists, I have taken a circuitous path to memory work. In 2008, I was working in the South Asia section of the University of Chicago Library, when I had the good fortune of meeting Samip Mallick. Mallick was working as the Outreach Coordinator for the South Asia Center on campus. We were jointly tasked with gathering materials for a memorial service honoring a South Asian American scholar. Pouring over the scholar's unprocessed collection in the university archives, Mallick and I started talking about South Asian American history. "Who is preserving these records?" Mallick asked. I had written a research paper on this topic as a master of library and information studies student and told Mallick about my findings. "No one is," I said. "There are no archives that have South Asian American history as a collecting priority." Mallick, a true force of nature, responded resolutely: "Let's do it!"

We both pitched in 100 dollars each, bought some server space, recruited Mallick's friend Jennifer Dolfus Ford to join us, and incorporated as a non-profit organization. Today, SAADA (http://www.saada.org) stewards the largest digital collection of records documenting South Asian American history in the world. Mallick is the organization's executive director, and I, after a few terms on its board of directors, serve as a senior advisor and member of its Academic Advisory Council.

SAADA documents, preserves, and provides access to the rich history of South Asians in the United States. We broadly define South Asian American to include those in the United States who trace their heritage to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe.[18] We have a particular emphasis on collecting materials related to pre-1965 South Asian immigration to the United States, to anti-South Asian race riots, to labor, to students, and to religious organizations, to political involvement, and to artists and intellectuals. We collect materials that are not just celebratory in nature, but reflect the diverse range of South Asian American experiences from the turn of the twentieth century to the present.

SAADA is a post-custodial digital-only archive, meaning that, rather than accepting custody of materials, we borrow physical materials, digitize them, return them, and steward digital surrogates. We have an office, but no central physical repository

that users can visit. Volunteers, interns, board members, and staff scan historic materials and collect born-digital sources, describe them in a culturally appropriate manner, link them to related materials in the archives, and make them freely accessible online to anyone in the world with an internet connection. After digitization, the physical materials are returned to and remain with the individual, family, organization, or repository from which they originated. Some of these individuals, families, and organizations then donate the physical materials to university or government repositories; others choose to retain them.

The organization has undertaken several projects that uncover and digitize historic materials, generate new records, and encourage the use of materials already in the collection. For example, with support from a National Endowment for the Humanities Common Heritage grant, SAADA organized two digitization day events in the Los Angeles area in 2016 in which community members brought materials to be digitized to pop-up SAADA stations in public libraries. SAADA's participatory First Days Project (www.firstdays.saada.org) encourages immigrants from anywhere in the world to record brief narratives about their first 48 hours in the United States. SAADA's Road Trips project (http://roadtrips.saada.org) helps redefine the American road trip by enabling community members to submit photographs and stories about the time they and their families spent travelling across the country by car; such stories of mobility have taken on added significance in the country's current xenophobic climate. The organization's magazine *Tides* (www.saada.org/tides) contextualizes more than 4,000 records in SAADA's collection by publishing articles that draw on, explicate, and add layers of meaning to the materials.

Over the past 13 years, working on SAADA has been an absolute labor of love. Under Mallick's expert leadership, the organization has grown from an idea scribbled on some scratch paper in the reading room at the University of Chicago library, to a world-forming, life-changing national community-based organization.

When we first started, professional archivists frequently dismissed us. We were told that community archives do not exist in the United States (in response to the majority of the literature on community archives emerging from the United Kingdom at that time), we were told that digital archives are not really archives (based on doubts about the sustainability of digital preservation), and that community archives are merely illegitimate "stepping stones" until the materials are ultimately donated to mainstream institutions (based on racist paternalism that assumes communities of color are not capable of stewarding their own materials). It has been amazing to witness seismic shifts in the field, such that, even with some continued pushback, there is now a large body of literature about community archives in the United States; now even the most technologically-averse archivists no longer see digital preservation as an oxymoron; and now even the most conservative archivists working in predominantly white institutions are talking about "community engagement." To have played a small part in these seismic shifts has been utterly gratifying.

Even more importantly for me, SAADA has had a major impact on South Asian Americans (the community we represent and serve) and on other fledgling

community archives, as my previous research has documented. We have empowered South Asian Americans to "suddenly discover themselves existing," to see themselves in history, and to strengthen ties to each other. While scanning materials in my office at UCLA is often a lonely, monotonous task, it is not thankless, as so many SAADA users tell us how the organization has transformed their classrooms, their relationships with elders and peers, and their views of themselves. We have also provided encouragement, advice, and resources to countless other communities of color and queer communities who are forming their own community archives in the United States and around the world. Mallick, SAADA staff and volunteers, and I routinely share materials, best practices, procedures, and documents with other community archivists and have taken great pride in watching other community archives take root and thrive. Following in the footsteps of advocates like Bergis Jules, Mallick and other community archivists have recently formed a Community Archives Collaborative to strengthen and codify this resource sharing.

While I am a part of SAADA's story, I remain an outsider to the community it serves and represents. I am a white American woman from a working class background. Neither of my parents graduated from high school. In junior and high school, I was bussed from my predominantly white neighborhood on the North Side of Chicago to a majority-Black public school on the South Side of Chicago as part of a now-defunct school desegregation program. I experienced massive culture shock when I arrived at the elite gates of Columbia University as a 17-year-old. I became a religion major focusing on South Asian religions, eventually pursuing a master's degree in theological studies focusing on Hinduism at Harvard Divinity School (a strange pursuit for an atheist Jew like myself), and gaining some linguistic proficiencies in Hindi, Urdu, and Sanskrit. After working for 15 years in museums and non-profit organizations, I decided I would pursue a master's degree in library and information studies in hopes of becoming a South Asia bibliographer. Yet, in SAADA's early years, I realized how much I loved research and writing and I decided to pursue a PhD in information studies. At that point in time, 2009, there was not much US-based research on community archives, and they were not seen as a dissertation-worthy topic. I wrote my dissertation, and then my first book, on records documenting human rights abuse in Cambodia, all the while volunteering for SAADA and thinking of ways to transform archival theory and practice by incorporating ideas from community archives.

As a white woman who co-founded an organization representing and serving a community of color, it has not always been easy figuring out my role. There is a continuum that posits white people, on one end, replicating white supremacist structures and appropriating cultures that are not their own, and on the other end, acting as co-conspirators with people of color for mutual liberation. I aim to always be on the side of the latter, but I cannot say I always get it right. I have tried to learn when to speak up and when to listen, when to provide direction, and when to take orders. I am no longer on SAADA's board of directors, as I believe it is more appropriate for South Asian Americans to lead the organization, but I will continue to be of service to SAADA for as long as the staff and board find me to be of use. Recently this has meant helping to set organizational policy and direction, to

providing feedback on new programs, speaking at events, fundraising, training new board members and volunteers, and digitizing new collections emerging from California.

As I continued work for SAADA, I have also pivoted toward doing anti-racist work among white archivists. I have created a workshop on identifying and dismantling white supremacy in archives that I have shared with thousands of archivists and MLIS students in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The concrete strategies for dismantling white supremacy in archives generated by an initial workshop conducted with my MLIS students in 2016 were brilliantly captured in a poster designed by my former student Gracen Brilmyer. The poster is freely available and designed to be printed out, shared, and displayed.[19] I distributed hundreds of copies at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in 2017 and I have heard enthusiastic reports of others displaying the poster and organizing their own workshops inspired by it. Yet I have also felt a growing sense of unease around this discourse, particularly around the ways that my positionality as a white person renders my work more palatable or legible to other white people, often at the expense of the voices of BIPOC archivists and scholars whose work I try to elevate. My unease also permeates the pages of this book. Here, again, I am operating on a continuum between replicating white supremacy and co-conspiring for its dissolution, always aiming to move the dial toward the latter, though admittedly not always successfully.

I consider these two projects—sustaining SAADA and other community archives and dismantling white supremacy in mainstream university and government repositories—to be twin pillars with the same goal: creating liberatory archival theories and practices. Through the anti-racist workshops and my work with SAADA, I aim to both dismantle the master's house *and* build a new house simultaneously, and pick up on Maria Cotera's reimagining of Audre Lorde's apt metaphor in the digital archival realm.[20] For me, this is both/and work; I must *both* tear down *and* build up, even if it means frantically doing twice the work. Part of this work for me has been building theory and research that critiques dominant Western archival theory and builds new liberatory theory and research based on the work of community archives.

Locating the research: methodologies

In my day job as a professor of archival studies, I am caught up in the world of research and teaching. In my volunteer position with SAADA, I am caught up in the microworld of removing staples and scanning and creating metadata and the macro-world of dealing with donors and writing grant proposals and setting organizational procedure and direction. I wear all of these hats in this book; for me those two roles are inseparable, my research informing my practice, my practice informing my research. I am *both* an archivist and a scholar.

As such, this book sits solidly within an interpretivist research paradigm, taking for granted both that reality is co-constructed between participant and observer, and that neutrality or objectivity, as a vestige of white supremacy, is neither possible

nor desirable. I am an inherent part of the phenomena I am describing. I bring my full self to this work, including my positionality as a white American woman, my political commitments as a feminist who aims (and often fails) to be anti-racist, and my experience and expertise as a scholar who co-founded a community archives. I am not a detached observer of community archives; I am an advocate for them who believes deeply in their transformative (if as of yet unrealized) potential.

As a scholar, I sit on the cusp of social science and humanities; I both collect empirical data to answer questions about *what is* and think critically about *what should be*. Both of these approaches are reflected in this book; I weave together both empirical data my research team and I created (interview and focus group transcripts and fieldnotes from participant observation) and pre-existing texts (such as archival records, art, and policy) to generate new theory.

On the social sciences research side, I direct a team of students at the UCLA Community Archives Lab.[21] The Lab explores the ways that independent, identity-based memory organizations document, shape, and provide access to the histories of minoritized communities, with a particular emphasis on understanding their affective, political, and artistic impact. Over the course of the past 5 years, the Lab team and I have conducted interviews and focus groups with founders, volunteers, records donors, and users at dozens of different community archives sites in Southern California. These sites include—but are not limited to—organizations like La Historia Society (documenting what was until the 1980s a Mexican American farm-working community in El Monte, east of Los Angeles), the Little Tokyo Historical Society (documenting the history of Japanese Americans in downtown Los Angeles, both before and after forced incarceration during World War II), Lambda Archives (preserving the LGBTQ+ history of San Diego), and the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine (documenting refugees and immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to the United States). The Lab team and I have reported on these findings through a variety of published articles that follow the standard social sciences format in terms of reporting on a research question, methodology, literature review, data, and analysis. I will not re-hash that format or those empirical findings in this book, but rather draw selectively from those findings to illustrate larger critical themes. In all instances, when research subjects are quoted by name, it is done with their expressed written consent at the time of the interview or focus group.

These larger-scale empirical efforts build on my deep engagement with SAADA as a site of participant observation and action research. Over the past 5 years, working closely with SAADA's staff and board, I have engaged in and written about the following tasks: written grant proposals; developed new programs; set organizational priorities and policies; evaluated applications for artists and fellows; conducted program evaluation; digitized collections; recruited and supervised volunteers and interns; helped to organize public programs, outreach events, and fundraisers; and written promotional materials. Throughout all of these activities, I take copious field notes, plan interventions, record results, and evaluate successes and failures, iteratively. The resulting ethnographic observations and analysis form the basis for much of the theory generated in this book, as well as providing examples of many ideas-in-action described throughout.

On the humanistic side, I also activate pre-existing texts (such as archival records, works of art, and policies), as evidence in support of critical theoretical arguments. As such, I am not concerned with social sciences preoccupation with generalizability across contexts. By contrast, I take care not to collapse important differences between sites and communities even as I work to identify commonalities between them. While I am building theory from specific experiences and sites, I do hope the theory I generate has broader resonances outside of the experiences and sites described.

Finally, parts of this book are speculative, extending empirical and theoretical work to imagine what a liberatory archival practice may look like. In this endeavor, I am inspired by the work of Marisa Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis, who urge library and information studies scholars to consider imagination as a research methodology, expanding Linda Tuhiwai Smith's rubric of decolonizing methodologies.[22] By imagining what does not yet exist, but *might* if we collectively will it, I am trying to extricate archival theory and practice from the constraints of the oppressive systems in which it is rooted and for which it has been a tool. My speculation is normative and prescriptive in the sense that I identify directions that I think archival theory and practice *should* take at the same time acknowledging my opinions about the future of archival practice are that of one person among many.

Locating the conversation: archival studies on fire

This book sits firmly within the domain of archival studies, a field I can confidently say is on fire. The past decade has seen an explosion of interest among a younger generation of practicing archivists, archival studies students, and archival studies faculty in critiquing dominant modes of archival theory and practice, and in imagining and enacting new ways of doing archives.

This recent burst of energy and insight, while encompassing various and sometimes conflicting methods, theories, and aims, can best be described as *critical archival studies*. In a 2017 special issue of the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* co-edited by myself, Ricky Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand, we define critical archival studies as those approaches that "(1) explain what is unjust with the current state of archival research and practice, (2) posit practical goals for how such research and practice can and should change, and/or (3) provide the norms for such critique."[23] Building off definitions of critical theory from the Frankfurt School and its reverberations in what is now known as Critical Library and Information Studies, critical approaches to archival theory and practice are unabashedly emancipatory in aim, emphasizing the structural and interlocking nature of various forms of oppression, white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy foremost among them. Critical approaches to archives not only reveal how power is imbricated in archival theory and practice, but seek to create a transformative praxis that liberates rather than oppresses.

Such approaches to archives are inspired by an integral part of similarly critical approaches to libraries, as embodied by the growing Critlib movement, a loose coalition of library workers dedicated to enacting social justice in library spaces.[24]

Through online discussions, conference presentations, and publications, those identifying with the Critlib movement take as a guiding question: "Recognizing that we all work under regimes of white supremacy, capitalism, and a range of structural inequalities, how can our work as librarians intervene in and disrupt those systems?"[25] Answers to this query require not just critique, but new modes of seeing and imagining. Gloria Leckie and John Bushman, in their introduction to the edited volume *Critical Theory in Library and Information Science,* write that critical approaches give us "the power to perceive unexpected relationships, to envisage alternative realities, and to reach beyond the taken-for-granted towards possibilities."[26] Most importantly, as this book argues, critical approaches also require us *to act*, to start to build the liberatory worlds that we have imagined.

This book is located within, builds off of, and expands critical archival studies, simultaneously situating the current state of archival discourses and practices in the oppressive structures from which they emerge, imagining new ways of thinking about and doing archives that emancipate rather than oppress, and most importantly, describing projects that begin to enact such visions of liberatory memory work. It argues, contrary to dominant tropes, that archival endeavors should not be about documenting the past, nor even about imagining the future (as I have previously argued), but about building a liberatory now.

I write specifically about liberation and "liberatory memory work," picking up on reoccurring motifs in Verne Harris's writings. Wendy Duff and Verne Harris first used the term "liberatory description" in 2002 to propose new ways of thinking about descriptive standards that, among other things, "would encourage archivists to get in under the dominant voices in the processes of record making… requir[ing] engagement with the marginalized and silenced."[27] Continuing in this vein, Chandre Gould and Verne Harris propose the term "liberatory memory work" in a 2014 report for the Nelson Mandela Foundation, to address a range of memory practices aimed at preventing recurrence of systemic injustice. Writing in response to a global gathering of memory workers from post-conflict societies, they write, "The aim of liberatory memory work is to release societies from cycles of violence, prejudice, and hatred and instead to create vibrant and conscious societies that strive to achieve a just balance of individual and collective rights."[28] "Memory work," as Stacie Williams notes, encompasses more than labor performed by MLIS-holding professionals in formal institutions, like libraries, archives, and museums, which often exclude people of color.[29] Instead, the term "memory work" acknowledges the informal spaces in which knowledge is passed across generations.

While liberation will take various forms, make various demands, and call for various archival theories and practices depending on context, liberatory approaches fundamentally center oppressed communities, using records and archives to invert dominant hierarchies caused by white supremacy, hetero-partriarchy, capitalism, and other forms of oppression. Such inversion is not aimed at replacing those currently at the top of the hierarchy with those at the bottom, but rather, at dismantling the notion and instantiation of hierarchy altogether, so that all humans can live more consensual lives, eliminating what Dean Spade calls "disparities in the distribution of life chances."[30]

The burden of action here, I argue, is on those who benefit from oppressive systems, not on those who suffer from them. More specifically in the western context, these beneficiaries align along the axes of power that Hope Olson has identified as "the white, ethnically European, bourgeois, Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied, male (WEBCHAM) presence."[31] To Olson's concise and necessarily specific "WEBCHAM" label, I add "cis" and "citizen" at the suggestion of Marika Cifor to form the term "WEBCCCHAM."[32] This is not to say that you must inhabit all of these vectors of identity to be at the top of the hierarchy in any given situation; quite the contrary. For example, the majority of American white women who voted for Trump in the 2016 election may suffer from patriarchy, but uphold white supremacy and even white supremacist patriarchy in order to secure their place in the racial hierarchy.

In contrast to dominant identity axes signified by my use of the term WEBCCCHAM, I use the term "minoritized" throughout to denote those identities, people, and communities excluded, misrepresented, marginalized, and/or oppressed by dominant groups, those whose presence is invoked by the flipside of each initial in the WEBCCCHAM moniker. This is not my term, but has emerged from Black studies, gender studies, and queer studies.[33] Minoritization is based on white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and other forms of oppression, and intersections thereof. Minoritization can occur irrespective of demographics; a community may be minoritized, even when it is mathematically in the majority.[34] Furthermore, the term "minoritized" shifts the action to those in power; people in power minoritize, or make others (those with less power) into a minority. It also shifts the responsibility to those in power to un-do the minoritization. In my use of the term "minoritized" I try not to collapse important differences between communities and forms of oppression, while also drawing connections and building solidarities among those experiencing different forms of oppression. I disambiguate by naming specific communities when possible, and use cross-category terms like Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and LBGTQ+ when applicable. I both try to name specific oppressions when possible and refer to broader oppressions when applicable.

The critique, imagination, and call-to-action offered by this book, and by critical archival studies more broadly, are indebted to the investigation of archives and power launched a generation earlier, leading up to and bridging the turn of the twenty-first century. Starting with the radical historian Howard Zinn's fateful admonishment of archivists to abandon their false claims to neutrality, continuing with Verne Harris's assertion that "the archive is the very possibility of politics" three decades later, and solidified with Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz's landmark inaugural *Archival Science* double issue on archives and power in 2002, the paradigm shift in archival studies has been well underway for awhile.[35] These demands by largely white scholars and archivists added to decades (if not centuries) of work by Black archivists, collectors, and memory keepers like Ida B. Wells, Dorothy Porter, and Arturo Schomburg, whose advocacy, recuperative collecting, and theory-building ran on a parallel track to their white colleagues, and whose work remains largely unrecognized by the canon of dominant Western archival theory.[36] In claiming that the field is newly energized by a critical stance, I wish not to present an ahistorical and linear narrative of archival progress, but rather acknowledge and

move beyond prior (and reoccurring) critiques from within the field. If younger generations of archival scholars and practitioners are formulating new critiques and emancipatory plans, as I am claiming, it is because they are building on the work of those who first embarked on these critical investigations decades ago.

These initial investigations into archives and power from within the archives world coincide and are imbricated with the birth of archival studies as an academic discipline, located within information studies. Previously the domain of under-employed historians, what we now refer to as "archival studies" began to more closely align with library science in the 1980s, such that most professional archival jobs now require a master's of library and information science degree, and by the 1990s, library and information studies departments (rather than history departments) began to confer doctoral degrees on scholars firmly rooted in the archival tradition. As library schools and library science were shifted to schools of information studies or "ischools," they brought archival studies along with them, such that we can now describe archival studies as a sub-field of information studies that is concerned with the creation, administration, and use of records as "persistent representations" and potential evidence of human activity that travel across space and time, as well as the people, communities, and institutions that steward them.[37] The term "archival studies" rather than "archival science" is deliberately chosen to include a range of methodological approaches, from the scientific and social scientific, to the humanistic, where my particular inquiry is situated.

Yet, as some scholarship in archival studies finds firm roots in the humanities, archival studies scholarship has largely been ignored by investigations into "the archive" from humanistic fields, such as anthropology, ethnic studies, gender studies, and literature. The two discussions—of "the archive" by humanities scholars and "of archives" by archival studies scholars (located in library and information studies departments and schools of information)—are happening on parallel tracks. The "archival turn" in the humanities, it seems, has veered humanities scholars firmly away from the very scholarship that has most critically engaged archival issues for decades. For humanities scholars, "the archive" has become a Foucauldian or Derridean metaphor, an idea, rather than a material reality. By contrast, archival studies scholars, while more than capable of metaphor and abstract thought, ground their theories in what I would call "actually existing archives," be they analog or digital, consisting of tangible or intangible records, held by individuals, families, communities, or institutions. All of the interventions on such actually existing archives are rooted in archival theory, whether made explicit or not. It is from this stream of archival studies—rather than humanistic inquiry into "the archive"—that this book emerges, though it also clearly attempts to intervene and disrupt the course of that stream. Yet, while firmly rooted in archival studies, this book is also greatly influenced by humanistic discussions of power, inequity, and social change. In putting critical theory from the humanities into conversation with archival theory from information studies, I hope to bridge the two disciplines and heal what has been an unproductive rift. As such, I hope that humanities scholars read this book as an entry point into archival studies, that they follow my footnotes to gain a more solid grounding in archival studies, and that we begin to speak *to* rather than *across* each other.

At the same time, this book is meant for archivists. It is both a tough-love letter and a rough blueprint, for myself and for other memory workers. I leave it to you all to fill in the details of your own to-do lists.

Definitions

In the spirit of finding mutual ground, particularly across fields, it is necessary to define some key terms used in this book. These terms are all hotly contested within archival studies. What are provided here are my interpretations.

Community archives

Diverging from centuries of archival thinking about government and bureaucratic records, the past decade has seen the rapid expansion of inquiries into what we now call community archives. The first attempt to describe the community archives phenomenon emerge from the U.K. Writing in 2009, Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd write "A community is any group of people who come together and present themselves as such and a 'community archive' is the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality."[38] Writing elsewhere, the same research team defined community archives as

> Collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose community members exercise some level of control… The defining characteristic of community archives is the active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible their history of their particular group and/or locality ***on their own* terms**.[39]

Although this definition holds up well in the U.K. cultural context, it requires some refinement in the US context in which I operate. More specifically, I argue that we cannot discuss the phenomenon of community archives in the United States without addressing power inequities. Here we can broadly divide community archives into two categories—those that represent and serve dominant communities, such as historical societies that are often invested in white supremacist histories as a way to maintain or increase local property values, and those that represent and serve under-represented, marginalized, and/or oppressed communities. It is the latter group of community archives that is the subject of this book. It is precisely those who have been disempowered by oppressive systems, those who have been "symbolically annihilated," those whose histories have been ignored, maligned, misrepresented, and/or grossly distorted by mainstream memory institutions (as agents of and conduits for those oppressive systems), who feel the need to create their own community archives, often at significant financial and personal cost. Thus to be more precise, this book is interested in marginalized identity-based community archives in which the history held in common coalesces around a shared history of oppression. Such oppression can be based on white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, ableism, and their complex intersections.

It is important, I think, to distinguish between marginalized identity-based community archives and local geographically based historical societies, the latter of which often serves to reinforce, rather than challenge or dismantle, oppressive power structures like white supremacy.

Another important distinction needs to be made between community archives in which community members have autonomy over archival practices, and extractive collective practices by which mainstream institutions, usually comparatively well-funded, predominantly white universities, collect materials from oppressed communities without entering into an ongoing relationship of care.[40] The latter of which is *not* a community archive by my definition, despite recent attempts to window dress such efforts as community archives for public relations and fundraising purposes. Such practices are indeed, extractive collecting, in line with centuries of extractive knowledge creation practices, in which large institutions and government agencies collect information *about* rather than *for* oppressed communities in order to intervene in, control, and administer their lives along the lines of the colonial power/ knowledge nexus so clearly laid out by Edward Said and Michel Foucault decades ago. That said, I am not yet ready to draw a firm line between independent community-based organizations and community archives located within universities, as I have seen several examples of truly community-engaged archival projects that do emerge from university settings, though they are often formed in opposition to and without support from the greater university administration. Examples include archives located within hard-fought autonomous spaces like ethnic studies centers and LGBTQ+ centers at American universities. Such projects meet the standards of community archives if there are mechanisms in place to ensure they are administered by and for, rather than just about, oppressed communities.

It is important to be clear here that the identities around which community archives coalesce are socially constructed. There is nothing "real" about race, ethnicity, or gender, for example, but the oppressive systems based on these categories have a real and lasting impact. As I have argued elsewhere, community archives instantiate what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has called "strategic essentialism," that is the temporary deployment of essentialist identity categories by marginalized groups for discrete political gain. Strategic essentialism simultaneously acknowledges that identity categories are socially constructed and builds solidarity among individuals who identity with such categories based on shared lived experiences of oppression.[41] That said, it is also important to acknowledge that "community" is not a monolith, nor is it warm and fuzzy; communities exclude as much as they include. Communities are also certainly capable of furthering oppression; there is nothing inherently liberatory about community, as this book addresses.[42]

Although variations between community archives make generalizations difficult, if not inaccurate, many community archives in the US context share common principles, as I have outlined elsewhere.[43] They are participatory, in which the community being represented and served actively participates in archival practices. They engage in shared stewardship in which custody of materials is not transferred in a discrete transaction from one party to the other, but rather, entails entering into an ongoing and mutual relationship. They reflect a multiplicity of viewpoints and record formats,

from written documents, to multimedia materials, to immaterial and intangible records. They are explicitly activist in orientation, exhibiting none of the professional pretense of objectivity or the false sense of neutrality still weighing down the practices of mainstream archives. They entail reflexivity, in which participants actively engage in self-critique with the goal of improvement. They value the affective or emotional impact of archival collecting and use, taking into consideration how records make people feel. Most importantly, in contrast to many mainstream collecting practices, community archives value people over stuff. The stuff—what gets collected—is only as important as it enables connections between people, who use the stuff to share stories, transmit memory, and build relationships.

Furthermore, these principles lead to ways of being and doing that challenge dominant archival practices. For example, as my research team at UCLA's Community Archives Lab has described, community archives have been at the forefront of building post-custodial approaches to archives, enabling, in one iteration, digitized records to be aggregated while analog materials remain dispersed.[44] In another example, community archives have forged new and creative paths to fiscal sustainability, raising small amounts of money from a large base of constituents, rather than relying solely on the generosity of an administrator deciding a fiscal line item, as many university archives do. For community archives, necessity has been the mother of invention, resulting in much more creative practices and agile responses to community needs than university or government repositories have demonstrated.

In this book, community archives are often contrasted with "mainstream archives," which I use to denote university and government repositories whose principles and practices align with dominant Western archival theory, which is rooted in white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and colonialism. We might also call these predominantly white institutions, as many scholars in ethnic studies and education have, or hetero-patriarchal institutions, depending on the nature of the oppression being examined. My usage of "mainstream archives" is admittedly clunky, but enables some flexibility depending on the context of identities and oppression.

Activist archives

In the introduction to their special issue of Archival Science on *Archiving Activism and Activist Archives*, Andrew Flinn and Ben Alexander lay out some distinctions that are key to situating the concepts in this book. They write that the term "active archivist" "describes an approach to archival practice which, rejecting professional advocacy of neutrality and passivity, acknowledges the role of the recordkeeper in "actively" participating in the creation, management and pluralization of archives and seeks to understand and guide the impact of that active role."[45] By contrast, archiving activism "describes an archivist or archival institution, whether formal or independent, acting to collect and document political, social movement and other activist groups and campaigns."[46] They further differentiate "active archiving" from "archival activism," which they describe as archivists' political action in using collections in support of social justice movements.

The community-based archivists described in this book are not merely active archivists or archiving activism, as Flinn and Alexander define it, but are archival activists engaged in activist archiving. They see themselves as both activists and archivists who steward records that they hope activists will use. Indifferent to or undeterred by dominant Western archival theory's claims to neutrality or objectivity, they collect materials with an explicit political aim. Whether that aim is representation or liberation is the subject of Chapters 2 and 3.

White supremacy

Throughout this book, I use the term "white supremacy" in reference to dominant Western archival theories and practices. White supremacy is, in the words of Frances Lee Ansley,

> …a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.[47]

White supremacy is closely related to white privilege, but white supremacy,

> more precisely describes and locates white racial domination by underscoring the material production and violence of racial structures and the hegemony of whiteness in settler societies. The concept of white supremacy forcefully calls attention to the brutality and dehumanization of racial exploitation and domination that emerges from settler colonial societies.[48]

White supremacy is a structural problem. It is not a matter of individual choice, preference, or predilection; it matters little if I am personally nice to or empathetic with the Black people in my life. Racism is structural, it produces structures that differentially impact people of color, especially Black and Indigenous people in the US context. As a white person, I benefit from these structures, regardless of my individual choices and attitudes. In order to dismantle white supremacy, we have to dismantle the worldviews, systems, structures, and policies it has guided for centuries.

As these definitions attest, when I am using the term white supremacy, I refer to worldviews, systems, structures, and policies that are much more pervasive and insidious than the self-professed white supremacist groups we may see on the news. The KKK is white supremacist, as is President Trump and his supporters, but so too are our justice system, our universities, and our archives. So too are the dominant cannon of archival theory and the repertoire of archival practice. White supremacy is baked into these systems.

I am not using this term in this way to needlessly provoke, although my usage may be considered provocative to readers steeped in dominant discourses. I can assure

these readers that there is nothing new or innovative about my use of the term "white supremacy"; indeed, entire fields of study, such as African American studies, Latinx studies, Asian American studies, women's studies, gender studies, and critical whiteness studies have invoked these terms in this way for decades.[49] Defensiveness over my use of this term is masked in false claims to innocence, as often expressed as public outrage that deflects from any taking of responsibility for promulgating, benefiting from, or even witnessing systems of oppression.[50] I suspect that readers who claim to be alienated by my use of this term are in fact, alienated by the ideas behind them, and not just the term itself. I would direct such readers to the many texts about racism and responses to it written by people of color.[51]

Chapter summaries

This book argues that archivists and users of archives can engage in liberatory memory work by activating records for temporal autonomy, self-recognition, and the redistribution of resources. The chapters are loosely organized around these three themes.

Chapter 1: A matter of time: archival temporalities makes the case that temporality—how we experience time and our place in it—is intricately bound to the liberatory potential of archives and memory work more broadly. In order to liberate ourselves from oppression, we must first liberate ourselves and our archival practices from dominant constructions that view time as a linear progression. The chapter uncovers how dominant Western archival theory relies on Christian progress narratives and asks us to imagine new ways of thinking about records that are not based on what I call the *chronoviolence* of dominant linear temporalities. Drawing on cyclical conceptions of time from Hinduism, African diasporic traditions, Indigenous North American philosophies, and queer theory, Chapter 1 exposes the fallacy of the supposed universality of linear progress narratives. The incommensurability of cyclical conceptions of time from these cultures, and linear progress narratives from dominant WEBCCCHAM cultures, has led philosopher Charles W. Mills to call the latter "white time."[52]

What does it mean to liberate archives and records from the "white temporal imaginary"? How has such a white temporal imaginary shaped dominant conception of archival labor as preserving traces of the past in the present for the future? How have such tropes, rooted in the white temporal imaginary, become instruments of oppression in dominant archival theory and practice? If records are, in the words of Geoffrey Yeo, "persistent representations of activities" that cross space and time, how are they transformed when time is conceived of as cyclical?[53] Translating a wide range of thinking about temporality from non-dominant traditions across the world, this chapter intervenes on foundational concepts in archival theory that assume time is linear, and sets up the book's main theoretical contribution, namely that archival labor should be harnessed in the contemporary moment as a disruption of both dominant white progress narratives and cycles of oppression that inequitably target people of color and queer communities. This chapter takes particular inspiration from critical race theorist Derrick Bell, who asserts that the

inequities of white supremacy are fundamentally constitutive of American governance and society, rather than merely vestiges of an earlier, less-perfect instantiation of American democracy that will inevitably be shed in favor of racial progress.[54]

Continuing the theme of time, in *Chapter 2: Community archives interrupting time,* I explore how community archives challenge dominant archival temporalities. Across the globe, communities have mobilized records in support of social justice activism, material reparation, and legal claims, as is well-documented in archival studies literature. Contextualizing American community archives as part of this international conversation, this chapter presents empirical evidence that people served and represented by marginalized identity-based community archives in the United States saw history repeating itself in the oppressive tactics of the Trump administration. More specifically, it will report on interviews and focus group data I conducted with people of color and LGBTQ+ people who use community archives to show how such communities are constructing their own cyclical conceptions of time in the current political moment.

Across communities and community archives sites, these interviews and focus groups revealed a prevailing sense that the historic trauma communities had suffered not only was never addressed and redressed, but that the same oppressive tactics communities experienced decades ago were being used in the current moment, that white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy were manifesting in the same ways as they had in the past, and that oppression that community elders had experienced as young people was happening to young people in the community again now.

Yet, it will also argue that members of marginalized communities see community archives, including their own use of and volunteer labor at community archives, as a way to intervene on those repetitions of oppression by constructing what I call *corollary records* to denote *corollary moments* in time. Across communities and identities, users of community archives articulated conceptions of archives as spaces to connect past injustice with contemporary activism. In so doing, these users of community archives are constructing a new conception of time, one in which archives have the potential to interrupt and change cycles of oppression in the now.

Adding representational justice to the discussion of temporal justice from Chapters 1 and 2, *Chapter 3: From representation to activation* explores the role of representation on the path to liberation. Using SAADA as a research site, this chapter demonstrates how one community archives has leveraged *representational and recuperative collecting*, as a form of *liberatory appraisal*, for contemporary political activism, what I call *liberatory activation*. This chapter builds on and goes beyond my previous work on symbolic annihilation and representational belonging to cover the possibilities for and constraints of representation in archives. More specifically, it addresses the relationship between symbolic and actual annihilation in archives, arguing that symbolic annihilation both precedes and succeeds actual annihilation, causing the dehumanization of subjects that both creates the conditions for violence to occur and minimizes its impact after its occurrence. Yet, this chapter also argues that, while symbolic and actual annihilation are intimately linked, more robust and accurate representation of minoritized communities is a limited (and limiting) goal for community archives. Instead, drawing on three recent SAADA

initiatives as examples, this chapter argues that community archives can go beyond representation, striving for liberation from oppressive structures (including the white temporal imaginary), rather than inclusion within them.

Chapter 4: Imagining liberatory memory work pushes back on dominant tropes about archivists as passive maintenance workers, neutral technicians, or even worse, "handmaidens" to historians, instead proposing a new role for archivists. Drawing on Gould and Harris's conception of "liberatory memory work," this chapter repositions the archivist as a liberatory memory worker, activating records for the liberation of oppressed communities. The chapter outlines the material, affective, and temporal dimensions of liberatory memory work, with an emphasis on the ways that records can be mobilized to achieve *chronoautonomy* (the ability of minoritized communities to build archives based on their own temporalities), self-recognition (the affective response to seeing one's self robustly represented), and the redistribution of resources to repair ongoing harms. Throughout this chapter, I offer archivists a two-pronged strategy of simultaneously dismantling oppressive practices and building liberatory practices.

Finally, the conclusion, *Liberation now!,* anticipates the question: Why disrupt cycles of oppression in the now if history will inevitably repeat itself? It then answers this question by way of asserting the joy of troublemaking in the present. It will argue against hope as a practical strategy or affective demand of archival labor, instead positing that disrupting oppression *in the now* is its own reward. By closing in on ways archivists can cultivate the joys of disruption in the current moment, the book concludes with a call-to-action for archivists based on the proposed re-conceptualizations of time, records, and archival labor. The aim is to inspire readers to activate archives to interrupt oppressive cycles.

Throughout, this book moves toward a new understanding of the nature of archival work. It provides us with new language to describe the ethical obligations of memory workers, and shifts us from a cruel and cold neutrality to a messy engaged commitment to co-liberation.

It challenges those of us involved in community-based archives to move beyond the politics of more robust representation (however important that is), and toward a liberatory activation of records that catalyzes their creation and use to dismantle systems of temporal, affective, and material oppression. Finally, it argues that we must do so urgently. These are big asks. Let's get started!

Notes

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Chapter 1

A matter of time

Archival temporalities

Writing on June 11, 2020, in the midst of an international uprising for Black lives that brought protestors to the Smithsonian's front doors, Lonnie G. Bunch, III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and Founding Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, tweeted, "We must collect today for tomorrow." Through that tweet Bunch announced a new coalition of Smithsonian and community-based curators to ensure adequate and robust documentation. The attached press release asserts, "The Smithsonian Institution is collecting today so that the world, in the present and future, can understand the role that race has played in our complicated 400-year history."[1] Such statements rely on a linear construction of time in which race is seen primarily as a problem of the past (and together with it, racism, one assumes), even as the uprising against *ongoing* racism is what is being documented in the present.

Bunch's tweet and the accompanying Smithsonian statement illustrate a common trope for archivists: we preserve traces of the past for the future.[2] The assertion is our professional elevator speech, how we quickly explain the importance of what we do. Yet this construction relies on a linear temporality that is rooted in dominant Western progress narratives. Such assertions should compel us to ask: Whose traces? Whose past(s)? Whose present(s)? Whose future(s)? Who is present in this conversation, of course, determines whose present is accounted for and to whom.

This chapter shifts the moment of archival responsibility, from a singular present to a multiplicity of uncertain pasts, presents, and futures, and posits that archiving traces of *ongoing* oppression demands a different orientation to time. First, it locates dominant Western archival thinking within linear Christian temporalities that assert the inevitable march of history toward human progress. Such constructions falsely assume that ongoing oppression is primarily a thing of the past and position archival interventions as key components of processes of learning from and improving upon that past. Yet these linear progress narratives are incommensurable with cyclical conceptions of time emerging from non-dominant traditions worldwide, including Hindu, Indigenous North American, Black, and queer temporalities, reflecting what philosopher Charles W. Mills calls "white time."[3] Using insights from critical race theory and queer theory, this chapter then uncovers the whiteness and heteronormativity of dominant archival temporalities that fix the record in a singular moment in time and imbue it with the potentiality of future use. It asserts that tropes that position

DOI: 10.4324/9781003001355-2

archivists as stewards of traces of the past for the future have become implicit instruments of oppression in dominant archival theory and practice. Most importantly, this chapter asks: Is it possible to liberate archives and records from the "white temporal imaginary"? In questioning notions of historical, political, and cultural progress, this chapter builds on assertions from critical race theory and queer theory that "it" indeed *does not* necessarily and inevitably *get better,* and repositions archival roles in response to ongoing and cyclical repetitions of oppression.[4]

Cyclical temporalities

Across a great swath of the world, many people have not historically and do not currently see time as a linear progression. As sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel plots out in *Time Maps*, time can be visualized through a wide range of models, including unilinear and multilinear, zigzag, corkscrew, and circular, each model rooted in and reflective of a particular worldview.[5] By briefly exploring some nonlinear temporalities, we can uncover the temporal assumptions embedded in dominant Western archival theory and practice and begin to generate new theories and practices that better represent non-dominant cultures and communities.[6]

In Hinduism, for example, time is cyclical, a "Mobius strip" as Wendy Doniger describes it.[7] Events happen, and then they happen again. There are four *yugas*, or epochs, within each cycle of time, the longest lasting 1,728,000 years and the shortest lasting 432,000 years. Social conditions get progressively worse as humans go through each age. The first epoch is characterized by truth and unity and humans live to be 100,000 years old. Then human virtue devolves through the ages, each epoch worse than the prior one, until you get to the Kali Yuga, which is characterized by greed, ignorance, war, environmental degradation, and poverty. In this age, people only live 100 years maximum.[8] This is the age we live in now by Hindu estimations. At the end of the Kali Yuga, the god Vishnu comes as Kalki riding a horse, killing evildoers, and destroying the world. But then, the whole thing repeats itself ad infinitum. One thousand of these cycles happen in just one day in the life of Brahma, the creator, and he lives to be 315 trillion years old. Even then, there is dissolution for a while, but then the whole things start up again, endlessly.[9]

Hinduism does not present the only ontological challenge to linear temporalities. Although the diversity of Indigenous North American cosmologies and ontologies render broad generalizations about conceptions of Indigenous time inaccurate, many Indigenous scholars have written about the ways in which time is layered and relational rather than linear and absolute. Sioux scholar Nick Estes, for example, writes,

> Indigenous notions of time consider the present to be structured entirely by our past and by our ancestors. There is no separation between past and present, meaning an alternative future is also determined by our understanding of our past. Our history is our future.[10]

Similarly, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, writing about the ontologies and epistemologies of her Nishnaabeg community, places cyclical time as one of many

factors that hold people, animals, and land in ethical relationship with each other. "Our stories have always talked about the future and the past at the same time," she writes, asserting, "rhythmic repetition is at the base of Nishnaabeg intelligence."[11] Drawing on these philosophies, literature scholar Mark Rifkin writes,

> Indigenous duration operates less as a chronological sequence than as overlapping networks of affective connection (to persons, nonhuman entities, and place) that orient one's way of moving through space and time, with story as a crucial part of that process.[12]

He writes,

> Rather than approaching time as an abstract, homogenous measure of universal movement along a singular axis, we can think of it as plural, less as a temporality than *temporalities.* From this perspective, there is no singular unfolding of time, but instead, varied temporal formations that have their own rhythms.[13]

Writing about what they call "historical unresolved grief," in Indigenous communities, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra M. DeBruyn assert, "The connectedness of past to present to future remains a circle of lessons and insights."[14] Time is overlapping circles of relationships, not a straight causal line of events.

Settler colonialism seeks to obliterate these cyclical temporalities in its ongoing quest for extraction. Pushing back against linear progress narratives, Rifkin asserts that these multiple temporalities are "not equivalent or mergeable into a neutral, common frame—call it time, modernity, history, or the present."[15] To force such merging is an extension of settler colonial violence. Instead of squashing such temporalities into a "settler time," that denies, flattens, and/or colonizes Indigenous constructions of temporality, Rifkin advocates for a "temporal multiplicity," that acknowledges several different and sometimes incompatible constructions of temporality.[16] Furthermore, he advocates for Indigenous "temporal sovereignty" or "the need to address the role of time (as narrative, as experience, as immanent materiality of continuity and change) in struggles over Indigenous landedness, governance, and everyday socialities."[17]

Black American scholars have written extensively about the epistemic violence permeating linear temporal constructions that insist that the past is over. Christina Sharpe, for example, writes that her work attempts "to articulate a method of encountering a past that is not past."[18] "How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?" she asks.[19] Addressing the ever-presence of enslavement and its impact, Sharpe writes, "In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present."[20] Drawing on nonlinear conceptions of time from African diasporic cultures, Afro-futurist thinkers envision new ways that past trauma influences future engagements with technology, highlighting the ways the past reoccurs even in speculative and liberatory futures.[21] A broad movement encompassing musicians, filmmakers, artists, novelists, and scholars crossing genres and centuries, Afro-futurists push

back against racist depictions of the present in which Black people are left behind by the digital divide and neoliberal visions of a raceless or color-blind future.[22] For Afro-futurists, the past is neither something that can *nor should* be left behind, but rather, becomes an inextricable informant to and, in some cases, coinciding temporality with, the future. While there is not a singular Afro-futurist construction of temporality, the movement asserts the presence of the past in the future in distinct contradiction to dominant white temporalities that assert the completion or over-ness of the past in the present and that assume social and racial progress over time.

Queer theorists have also dismissed linear temporalities, rooting them in heteronormative expectations for biological reproduction and capitalist expectations for productivity, instead proposing nonlinear queer genealogies and temporalities. As Mark Rifkin writes, "The idea of a singular, linear unfolding in which the present supersedes the past might be thought of as a form of 'compulsory heterotemporality'…"[23] Elizabeth Freeman characterizes linear temporal regimes as "chrononormativity," which she defines as "the interlocking temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent and for the mundane workings of domestic life."[24] She writes, "chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts… Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time."[25] Heteronormative domesticity orders time not just for the individual body and family, but at the societal level, as expectations for success, growth, productivity, and wealth accumulation get engrained and amplified through systems of chronobiopolitics. In this "event-centered" and "goal oriented" structuring of time, "the logic of time-as-productive… becomes one of serial cause-and-effect: the past seems useless unless it predicts and becomes material for a future."[26] In the face of this chrononormativity, queer theorists have posited a queer time that revels in the art of failure and a refusal of productivity. As Halberstam writes, "Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, and becoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" than adhering to chrononormative expectations.[27] In their most extreme form, some queer temporalities pose a negation of the future. For example, in Lee Edelman's book *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman rails against futurities that rely on the protection and/or preservation of the figure of "The Child," instead constructing queerness as a "child-averse, future-negating force."[28] Other queer theorists, like heather love, refuse Edelman's abandonment of the future, instead imagining "a backward future," "apart from the reproductive imperative, optimism, and the promise of redemption."[29] She continues:

> While liberal histories build triumphant political narratives with progressive stories of improvement and success, radical histories must contend with a less tidy past, one that passes on legacies of failure and loneliness as the consequences of homophobia and racism and xenophobia… To feel backward is to be able to recognize something in these darker depictions of your life without needing to redeem them.[30]

While there is no consensus on what constitutes a singular queer time, queer temporalities refuse to reproduce the logic of dominant linear progress narratives, akin to the Hindu, Indigenous, and Afro-futurist temporalities described.

If many of the world's traditions and theories construct time in a nonlinear fashion, as just outlined, how have linear temporalities come to dominate contemporary Western societies? What are the politics of such linear temporalities and how do they work to embed white supremacy and heteronormativity (and indeed WEBCCCHAM ways of being), into our notion of history and archives?

Linear temporalities and white time

Linear time emerges from the Abrahamic faith traditions, and in its dominant Western instantiation, is inextricably Christian.[31] In a now-pervasive (due to colonialism) and continually re-enforced (due to neo-colonialism) Christian view, time plods along in a straight line to reach the milestone event of Jesus's birth, marking the beginning of a new count of and accounting for time. After Jesus's birth, time restarts. A new time, marked by a new calendar, continues apace in a linear fashion, one thing after the other, cause and effect, each event progressing from the one that came before it, until the end of time. Eschatology is the subfield of Christian theology that explores this end of time, the apocalypse, the second coming of Christ, a thousand-year rule of peace, a final judging and sorting, good vs. evil, light from darkness, heaven from hell. Tomes of Christian theology have been written about the order of these events and whether or not humans can or should hasten them with their actions. These raging debates are beyond the scope of this book, but the Christian notion of a linear progression is a key concept here.

To view time progressively is to posit a sense of linear temporal movement marked by the improvement of the human condition. Things inevitably get better over time. Oppression wanes, ignorance is dispelled, rights are accrued, honored, and enforced. A progressive view of time is best summarized by the construction, first formulated by a Unitarian minister Theodore Parker, made famous by Dr. Martin Luther King, oft-repeated by President Barack Obama, that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.[32] Justice is the inevitable end goal in Christian eschatology; all events are merely steppingstones on that inescapable march toward the apocalypse, in which the messiah returns, a cosmic justice is enacted, and time ends.[33] This notion of progress, emerging from Christian theology, codified by Enlightenment thinking and central to modernity, relies on what literature scholar Mark Rifkin calls "the straightness of time (and the ongoing transcendence of the past)."[34] Progress insists, "later is better."[35]

Time as a linear progression is woven throughout the European philosophical tradition, from the Enlightenment to Hegel, from social Darwinism to positivism. Here, it is impossible to tell the history of white time without repeating its own linear logics. For brevity's sake, I will start with Hegel, picking up on the Christian linearity previously described. For Hegel, there were "primitive" societies and "advanced" societies, and History, with a capital "H," was the unidirectional progression toward the perfection of the liberal state. Greatly influenced by Hegel,

Marx too plots a straight arrow of time. In his historical materialist formulation, each society inevitably progresses through feudalism, capitalism, and proletariat revolution leading, inexorably, to socialism. For Marx, colonized countries are just *behind the times*; their colonization will hasten the coming revolution, enabling "mankind [to] fulfill its destiny."[36] Picking up on these strands nearly 150 years after Marx, Francis Fukuyama furthered the idea of a "directional history," ending not with socialism, but with the liberal democracy he argues that many Western countries have, by the early 1990s, reached.[37] As Fukuyama delineates, "the logic of modern natural science," with its positivist claims to Truth and valorization of rational empiricism, runs parallel to these claims on history, buttressing the social and political with (pseudo) scientific evidence of human progression over time.

Due to vast inequities of power, differences in conceptions of time are not merely philosophical, but have massive daily impact on lived experience, as oppressed communities are forced to restructure their actions to adhere to the demands of dominant linear notions of time. Media studies scholar Sarah Sharma posits the notion of temporality as "an awareness of power relations as they play out in time," marking how global regimes of capital enforce "a chronography of power," that metes out time unequally and inequitably according to capital's ever-increasing demands on labor.[38] Time, Sharma reminds us, is organized and distributed along axes of power.

Power in contemporary Western societies is racialized and deeply rooted in white supremacy. Writing in 1999, Africana studies scholar Michael Hanchard defines "racialized time" as, "the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups." He continues, "Unequal relationships between dominant and subordinate groups produce unequal temporal access to institutions, goods, services, resources, power, and knowledge."[39] For Hanchard, racialized time manifests in the manufactured expectation of waiting, time appropriation, and, most importantly for this investigation, the pressures brought on by the notion of progress, or "the belief that the future should or must be an improvement upon the present."[40]

Adding specificity to Hanchard, and building on George Lipsitz's notion of white space, philosopher Charles W. Mills proposes the notion of "white time." Not only does dealing with racist policies "take time," but such policies also redistribute time, producing "regimes of temporal exploitation and temporal accumulation" ultimately "*transferring* time from one set of lives to another" resulting in both premature death for Black people and prolonged life spans for white people.[41] This inequitable distribution of time also has been described by activist, artist, and lawyer Rasheedah Phillips, who notes how racialized poverty and criminalization impose white temporal regimes on her Black clients and neighbors, ranging from the imposition of a perpetual state of waiting (for legal decisions, for benefits, for prison time to end, for example), to impossible expectations of being on-time for court dates, school, and work and of paying rent and other bills on time.[42] Phillips's clients are criminalized for failing to conform to a white notion of progress in which each individual is expected to improve their own lot through hard work, moral gumption, and timeliness. Expectations of adhering to "white time" are produced, in the words of Mills,

by a "White temporal imaginary… structuring social affect as well as social cognition, and helping to constitute exclusionary gated moral communities protected by temporal, no less than spatial, walls."[43] White time, for Mills, instantiates across multiple venues: in settler societies that deny history before colonization; in dominant expectations of productivity and proper use of time; and in carceral regimes of waiting and "serving" time. Mills writes, "Whites are self-positioned as the masters of their own time, as against those mastered by time."[44]

In the contemporary American context, white time asserts that the United States is an as-of-yet unfulfilled promise of democracy getting closer and closer to realization, rather than a foundationally and fundamentally white supremacist project that is proceeding as planned. Thus, white time is built not just on linear temporalities, but on grand notions of being in the midst of progress toward a post-racial (and therefore, according to dominant white logics, more *just*) future, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Mills posits, "White time recapitulates the aspirational post-racial future not just in the present but in the past, so that the immanent realization of the abstract norm (raceless humanity, which is White humanity) is already waiting to be unfolded."[45] In other words, in white time we are slogging inevitably toward a color-blind future, however bumpy the road may be. In white American political ideology, it is *only a matter of time* before everyone is treated as white, whiteness held out eternally as the ideal state of being. While whiteness remains attainable or achievable to an ever-greater swathe of the population in this progressive construction of whiteness, the vision remains white supremacist at its core.

In a rebuke of dominant white philosophers' inability to account for racism and racial difference in conceptions of justice, Mills writes:

> White time here is the illusory inclusiveness of a hypothetical alternative time-track being presupposed as actual: a possible world which could conceivably have developed, but never did; which cannot now be reconstructed—but which is nonetheless being represented as the common time in which to investigate questions of justice.[46]

That is, the white temporal imaginary conceives, builds, and enforces systems of racial inequity based on false notions of progress reliant on a desired future condition of post-racial-ness. Though whiteness constructs such post-racial-ness as ideal and inevitable, it is not only an impossible condition, but also an undesirable one; any conception of future justice in which the ideal subject is white is inherently white supremacist. Furthermore, the white temporal imaginary posits a clean linear break from oppression; oppression was in the past, it is being adjudicated in the now, it will be absent in the future. As such, white temporality fails to acknowledge the oppression of white supremacy as an ongoing and ever-pervasive reality for communities of color. The event to be memorialized, in this case structural racism as manifested by enslavement, state terrorism, and incarceration, is not yet over, to draw on Christina Sharpe's incisive question about chattel slavery.

Mills' conceptualizations of white time and the white temporal imaginary philosophically map onto the work of racial realists from legal studies who refuse

dominant narratives of the decline of racism in the United States. As the prevailing white story goes: the United States was founded on the enslavement of Africans; enslaved Black people were freed after the Civil War; their Black descendants engaged in nonviolent protests; in 1965 Black Americans received full citizenship rights; in 2008 Barack Obama was elected President.

Critical race theorists like Derrick Bell have exploded this notion of racial progress in the United States, noting that, despite the legal gains of the civil rights era, white people continue to benefit from racism, as shown by all commonly assessed indicators of disparity, such as income, wealth accumulation, incarceration rates, and life expectancies. In the face of such persistent inequality, Bell and other racial realists suggest a divergent strategy, outside of dominant legal progress narratives and counter to what Mills calls the white temporal imaginary. Bell writes:

> As a veteran of a civil rights era that is now over, I regret the need to explain what went wrong. Clearly we need to examine what it was about our reliance on racial remedies that may have prevented us from recognizing that these legal rights could do little more than bring about the cessation of one form a discriminatory conduct that soon appeared in a more subtle though no less discriminatory form. The question is whether this examination requires us to redefine goals of racial equality and opportunity to which blacks have adhered for more than a century. The answer must be a resounding 'yes.'[47]

In this way, racial realists like Bell call into question dominant progress narratives that posit the legal and administrative gains of the 1960s as milestones in an inevitable path toward American racial equality, ending in a utopic post-racial future. Inverting the progress narrative, Bell posits that the ideals of racial equality in the United States are not only unrealistic but also harmful in that they cause Black Americans to be in a constant state of "frustration and despair" due to the gap between a perceived sense of progress and a reality of oppression.[48]

How are we to enact liberation in the face of such despair? For Bell, the answer is not to simply give up, but rather, switch strategies. He writes:

> Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary 'peaks of progress,' short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it and move on to adopt policies based on what I call: 'Racial Realism.' This mindset or philosophy requires us to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status. That acknowledgment enables us to avoid despair and frees us to imagine and enact racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph.[49]

That is, accepting the inevitability of white supremacy in the United States liberates activists to commit to attainable goals and concrete strategies for reducing harm and improving lived realities for Black Americans outside of the white

temporal imaginary that would assert progress as a stepping stone toward the inevitable fulfillment of an as-of-yet unfulfilled American promise.

The legal and ethical strategies of the racial realists rest upon a cyclical rather than linear construction of time. Instead of viewing American history as the inevitable triumph of post-racial equality, Bell constructs it as a cycle of reoccurring and ongoing racial traumas. He writes,

> … for too long we have comforted ourselves with the myth of 'slow but steady' racial progress. In fact, our racial status in this country has been cyclical–legal rights are gained, then lost, then gained again in response to economic and political developments over which blacks exercise little or no control. Civil rights law has always been part of rather than an exception to the cyclical phenomenon.[50]

Indeed, as racial realists have noted, progress for Black Americans has only been achieved when it coincides with the interests of whites, a concept Bell called interest convergence.[51] In challenging the notion of racial progress, critical race theorists reveal and disrupt the white temporal imaginary, instead proposing an alternative cyclical temporality that expects and explains repetitions of oppression throughout time and space.

Considering the work of critical race theorists, we can make some basic observations based on our current historical-cultural-social-political moment in the American context (writing in July 2020), that *it does not necessarily get better* and that the arc of the moral universe does not necessarily bend toward justice. Instead of an inevitable linear march toward progress, we are witnessing and participating in cycles of oppression: two steps forward, two steps backward. Progress is not the default setting of an inherently oppressive system. There is no end goal of liberation baked into racist American structures, however slow liberals might say it takes it get there. Instead, our systems (of government, of justice, of property, and of education) are built to oppress. The institutions built around these systems are designed to perpetuate rather than progressively dismantle white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy. In this, they are exceptionally successful. Furthermore, these systems perpetuate oppression cyclically, rendering an illusion of progress, such that we may think we were making small but steady steps toward liberation, liberal steps, reforming steps, but then too much pressure on the system and it crashes, pulls back; without dismantling the system, the system clamps back down to ensure it fulfills its oppressive design, in cycles. Without a systemic intervention in dismantling the oppression at its root, without a full stop and redesign, the oppressive systems continue to oppress by design. History may not precisely repeat itself, but it mimics itself perfectly. Progress becomes just a figment of the white temporal imaginary.

White time, records, and dominant Western archival theory

What impact does the white temporal imaginary have on dominant Western archival concepts? Why talk about time in a book about archives? The development of

dominant Western archival theory coincides with and is an inextricable part of modernity, and, unsurprisingly, relies on and reinforces a host of Enlightenment concepts, including a linear notion of time. Extending the work of Charles W. Mills, we may say that dominant Western archival theory relies not just on linear Christian time or modernity, but on white supremacist, patriarchal, and heteronormative temporalities, that is, notions of time that are inextricable from and invested in whiteness, maleness, and straightness. Specifically, dominant Western archival concepts are cleaved onto notions of social progress, which, in the American context, translates into linear white narratives of racial progress ending in an inevitable post-racial white future.[52] This section traces the temporal logics of dominant Western archival theory, from a definition of records that is built on a linear temporality separating event from record from use, to the future potential for the activation of such records, once-archived, to demonstrate milestones toward social progress in a linear narrative. Dominant Western archival theory's twin fixations with fixity and futurity belie the white temporal imaginary.

In the dominant archival temporal logic, the past is singular and it is over. It is merely, in the words of eminent archival theorist Terry Cook, prologue to the future.[53] The present, in this construction, is where the action happens, where archival interventions occur. Yet, the consequences of such interventions—namely use–get deferred to some unspecified future. That future is also singular in this construction, reliant on the past, and inevitable. It unfolds naturally from the past, logically, uni-directionally, and irreversibly. And, most importantly, the future is an improvement on the past in this construction, an ethical step ahead, culminating in some ill-defined utopic time, the realization of full human potential. This linear construction posits records as seeds planted in the past to be watered in the present and harvested in the future, as my own past work has asserted.[54] As Samantha Winn writes, "Western archivy operates from implicit and explicit assumptions of futurity"—faith that the future will come, that archives will still exist in the future, that records in archives will be of use in the future, a futurity Winn questions due to climate change.[55]

A linear notion of time is so fundamentally embedded in dominant Western archival theories and practices that it is difficult to extricate the two. As archivist Kimberly D. Anderson brilliantly lays out, dominant interpretations of foundational archival concepts, like record and evidence, are predicated on "the requirement for a temporal disconnect between [record] creation and use."[56] The record was created as a "byproduct" of an event. The event is over; the record remains. The record, if preserved now, can be used in the future. There is a straight line between creation, archiving, and use. For example, the Society of American Archivists' *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* defines "record" as:

> 1. A written or printed work of a legal or official nature that may be used as evidence or proof; a document. 2. Data or information that has been fixed on some medium; that has content, context, and structure; and that is used as an extension of human memory or to demonstrate accountability. 3. Data or information in a fixed form that is created or received in the course of individual or institutional activity and set aside (preserved) as evidence of that activity for future reference.[57]

In this construction, records are fixed (in both time and format), they are deemed archival, they are preserved, and they travel from the past to the future to serve as evidence.

Fixity is key here. The SAA glossary entry on record continues:

> *Fixity* is the quality of content being stable and resisting change. To preserve memory effectively, record content must be consistent over time. Records made on mutable media, such as electronic records, must be managed so that it is possible to demonstrate that the content has not degraded or been altered…[58]

Yet this notion of fixity belies a host of temporal assumptions that presume fixity in a point of time and space is *possible*. If time is cyclical, overlapping, and recurring, so are the events that produce records. Fixity thus becomes a fiction. And not just a fiction, but an instrument of control. Writing about the disastrous incorporation of Indigenous records into settler archives in the Canadian context, J.J. Ghaddar, writes, "Like pinning a butterfly to a wall mounting, a record fixes events and actions in time and therefore keeps the fear at bay."[59] In this dominant formulation of records, fixity is what enables records to serve as evidence of the past; what is fixed is ontologically reliable, what is fluid is suspect.

In another prevailing—and more expansive—definition in archival studies advanced by Geoffrey Yeo, records are "persistent representations of activities created by participants or observers of those activities or by their authorized proxies."[60] While Yeo rightfully shifts us from fixity to persistence, the "temporal disconnect" Anderson notes is still fully embodied here, as Yeo continues, "records are persistent in the sense that they endure beyond the temporal ending of the activities they represent."[61] The event happened; it is over. The record was created; it endures (with proper archival intervention). Anderson rightfully criticizes Yeo's definition by claiming it presupposes "a distinction between past and present" and the possibility of a "temporal ending," which Anderson claims is an impossibility as records—and their uses—actually change over time.[62]

Anderson further argues that the dominant Western archival insistence on the physical instantiation, or materiality, of records relies on this temporal break between record creation and use, which in turn, relies on linear temporalities. She writes,

> Time has been stopped within the record… Evidence in the historical context always indicates a break from some previous moment in time. The past and present blend and merge, but there is a disconnect from the present moment in order for the past to be perceived as 'past'.[63]

Anderson aptly posits that the very foundational concept in dominant Western archival theory—record—relies on a linear temporality that posits a temporal break between historic events, record creation, deposit in an archives, and use as evidence. "What does evidence mean when the past may not come before the future?" she asks.[64]

Evidence, according to SAA's and Yeo's constructions, is what makes records *records* (and, by extension, what makes archives (as collections of records) *archives*). Thus while records contain information, they are distinct from other forms of documents in that they may also serve as evidence of action; they are forever-into-the-future linked to the action that created them. Philosopher of information Jonathan Furner further clarifies that records are not evidence in and of themselves, but are defined by their potentiality; they are *capable* of serving as evidence in support of claims about the past by a wide range of users in the present and future.[65] In this sense, records are of the past but defined by their future potentiality.[66]

Archival use, in dominant constructions, is always shifted toward some unknown future. For example, the Society of American Archivists' "Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics" asserts, "Archivists thus preserve materials for the benefit of the future more than for the concerns of the past."[67] In the dominant American conception taken from T.R. Schellenberg, records have primary value in fulfilling the function for which they were created, and secondary value to future and yet-unknown archival users for future and yet-unknown research purposes.[68] In the associated model, records adhere to a "lifecycle"; they are created or received, used for their intended purposes, and disposed, either in the trash or in an archive, where they are used by researchers.[69] Although the life cycle model is depicted as a circle, it in fact enacts a linear logic, as the move from "disposition" to "creation" does not in fact flow circularly; disposition of records to an archives does not lead to their creation in the same way "distribution" of records might lead to their "active use," and "active use" might lead to "storage," etc.[70] As Anderson writes, "The Life Cycle concept maps neatly on to a past-present-future framework where past is the creation, present is the use of the record by the creator, and future is the eventual deposit of the record into an archive."[71]

Action and its evidence. Primary and secondary values. Record creation and use. These conceptual pairs rely on a clean "temporal break" in a linear model as Anderson describes. Yet linear temporalities are not universal, context-less, or value neutral, as previously outlined. They are fundamentally rooted in Enlightenment thinking and in white cultural imaginaries of racial progress, and have been imposed on much of the world through colonialism and neocolonialism.

What happens when we extend Anderson's apt arguments to consider not just how linear temporality is embedded in dominant western conceptions of record, but how white narratives of social progress are also embedded in the assumed linear temporality of use? The temporal break Anderson identifies relies on a construction of time based on linear Western, and, extending Mills, white temporalities that also co-locate a moral, ethical, and social progression over time and, arguably, inevitably end in a post-racial society. If the arc of the moral universe is bending toward justice, then records are not just fixed evidence of the past, they are fixed evidence of some morally less-just past. As such, they can then be used in some more-just future, a future closer to the justice-end of the arc of the moral universe, which, as Mills asserts, is most-often a white post-racial vision of justice. This is the assumed progression: injustice happened in the past; it is over; it the archivist's duty to preserve traces of it; the traces that we archive can be used in the future to create a more just society.

The Smithsonian summarizes it best in stating, "The mission of the National Museum of American History is to empower people to create a just and compassionate future by exploring, preserving, and sharing the complexity of our past."[72]

Not only does this construction assume a straight line between past, present, and future, it also assumes that the real issue society faces is ignorance, and not maldistribution of power; if only we learned from the mistakes of the past by engaging with our history, our future society would be (magically, somehow) more just, the logic asserts. As such, the societal role of the archivist is to preserve traces of the past and encourage educational use of those traces; it is not to fundamentally shift power structures. Yet, as critical race theory teaches us, it is not white ignorance that is keeping racist structures in place; it is white interest in maintaining power. Endless history lessons based on infinite activation of records cannot produce white "interest convergence" (to use Bell's term) in dismantling systems of white supremacy that continue to benefit whites. For example, self-identified white supremacists may know intimate details about Confederate history; they terrorize people of color not because they do not know history, but out of the desire to maintain power according to racist structures emerging from the past. Thus, there is nothing inherently liberatory about preserving traces of the past or encouraging their activation; without a power analysis, archivists sink further into the white moral abyss of neutrality and objectivity, which, as Mario H. Ramirez convincingly argues, is a guise for promulgating whiteness.[73]

Although much of the recent literature on archives and social justice pays overt attention to power, it often replicates a linear progression that defers justice to some unknown future activation of records. As Wendy Duff, Andrew Flinn, Karen Suurtammn, and David Wallace summarize, "The potentiality of archives to impact on social justice may lie dormant until they are utilized and fed into the public arena."[74] Thus records are defined by their future and infinite potentiality for activation. My own past work on "liberatory archival imaginaries" falls into this linear trope. Addressing records documenting anti-colonial activism in SAADA, I write:

> In order to construct liberatory archival imaginaries, we must use traces of the past not just to recuperate marginalized histories, but to build more just and equitable futures. Liberatory archival imaginaries place the work of what happened in the past in service of building socially just futures.[75]

Although I still concur with the multiplicity of the futures I have posited, I would now reformulate that construction to emphasize both the continuation of injustice and the need to activate traces *in the now* for resistance and activism against oppressive power structures *in the present*. To shift activation to some vague future gives archivists a free pass from a power analysis in the present, an "archival amnesty" as Tonia Sutherland might describe it.[76]

Furthermore, any discussion of archival responsibilities and roles must acknowledge that white supremacy and heteropatriarchy are not just systems of the past, but rather ongoing scourges. The literature surrounding post-conflict archives or archives and transitional justice, for example, often assumes a clean break during

and after conflict, a regime change that enacts new policies different from those oppressive policies that came before.[77] Yet what to make of records documenting abuse when the conflict is ongoing, unresolved, and unacknowledged? The United States, for example, is not post-conflict, but mid-conflict, with most white Americans failing to acknowledge a conflict at all. The state-sponsored murder of Black Americans did not end with enslavement, but merely morphed into mass incarceration, as many Black scholars have argued.[78] How are records to be used to memorialize a past that is not yet past, to paraphrase Sharpe? Delaying the activation of records to the future is not-soon-enough; oppression needs to be dismantled in the midst, in the now. As Wendy Duff, Andrew Flinn, Karen Suurtammn, and David Wallace write,

> Through its traditional focus on 'the past', and a narrowing focus on archival exposure of past injustices, archives safely stay one step behind recognizing and addressing present injustices... The implicit and explicit danger here is avoiding and voiding linkages between historical and contemporary struggles, thereby helping to sustain the mythology of a disinterested, neutral, and honest brokering profession.[79]

To draw on Mills, these archival constructions are based not just on linear time, but white time, as racialized versions of the past and visions of the future are constructed, distributed, and enacted according to the temporal logics of white supremacy.

Extricating records from white time

The first section of this chapter took us on a brief tour of Hindu, Indigenous North American, Afro-futurist, critical race, and queer temporalities to show how multiple co-existing non-dominant temporalities challenge the foundations of linear progress narratives. The second section argued that the construction of time as a linear progression has become deeply engrained in dominant and dominating structures of whiteness. The third section of this chapter explored how white time is thus embedded in dominant Western archival concepts like "record" and evidence." If we are to use Mills and Bell to critique dominant Western archival theory, as I have suggested here, we uncover that such theory relies on the white temporal imaginary. As Mills writes, "Whiteness remains representative of the human condition through the suppression of alternative histories, the non-White times, of other humans."[80]

To build archival theories and systems based on one dominant yet unnamed temporality masquerading as universal is to ignore and de-legitimate countless other non-dominant ways of viewing time. Given that time is a fundamental component of ontology and epistemology, to steamroll nonlinear temporalities enacts ontological and epistemic violence on minoritized world views, what we may call *chronoviolence*. Chronoviolence asserts that the linear white way of constructing time is the *only* legitimate way, and then, through colonialism and white

supremacist power structures, makes the world conform to the expectations of white temporality. Furthermore, chronoviolence insists that future progress is not only inevitable, but that we are living through the fruits of past progress in the present, that is, that our current moment is more just than the past. As such, chronoviolence gaslights members of oppressed communities who insist that what has been constructed as oppression of the past is indeed not past, but ongoing. Dominant Western archival theory enacts white supremacist chronoviolence by constructing core concepts like records and evidence based on white temporal imaginaries without placing them historically, socially, or culturally, in other words, constructing them as unnamed or natural universals instead of showing how they emerge from the specific context of modernity, colonialism, and whiteness.

What would an archival theory extricated from the chronoviolence of white temporal imaginaries look like? What would it look like to disentangle our definition of record, and by extension, archives, from the linear progress narrative and white temporality presented by dominant Western archival theory? How might non-dominant temporalities help us rethink both the core concept of record and our archival interventions on records? To raise the stakes, is it possible to liberate archival theory from white supremacy?

Some critical archival theorists have begun this extrication. The records continuum model challenges linearity, replacing the life cycle with concentric circles that reflect dynamic and transformative nature of archival interventions and uses. Yet even the records continuum relies on the fixity of records and the futurity of use. Sue McKemmish writes, "while a record's content and structure can be seen as fixed, in terms of its contextualization, a record is 'always in a process of becoming.'"[81] The record is fixed, yet its meaning is deferred to (multiple) future(s). Additionally, 20 years ago archival theorists identifying as postmodernist or deconstructionist dispensed with both fixity and linear temporality, but are still fundamentally future-oriented. Eric Ketelaar, for example, subverts the requirement for fixity by positing that records change each time they are "activated." Each activation becomes part of the records' "semantic genealogy," in turn influencing all future activations of the record. Ketelaar writes, "Current uses of these records affect retrospectively all earlier meanings, or to put it differently: we can no longer read the record as our predecessors have read that record."[82] These activations are multiple, they render the record itself fluid, and they are not bound by linear time. Yet they are still future-facing; they insist records "open out into the future" instead of emphasizing their use *in the now*. My own prior work on the use of photographic records from the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia echo this future-oriented model of use.[83]

While these constructions begin to chip away at some of the temporal assumptions embedded in modernist definitions of record, they do not go far enough to disrupt the requirements of fixity and futurity. For answers, we must look toward the majority-world memory keeping traditions that have been resisting white linear temporalities ever since colonialism sought to impose them. Indigenous, African diasporic, and queer archival theorists have challenged dominant Western definitions of records that rely on a fixed timeline between event, record creation, and

use. Most recently, queer archival theorists have also upset the temporal linearity that is baked into dominant Western archival theory and practice.

For a perspective based on Indigenous Australian philosophies, Shannon Faulkhead defines records as "any account, regardless of form, that preserves memory or knowledge of facts and events. A record can be a document, an individual's memory, an image, or a recording. It can also be an actual person, a community, or the land itself."[84] For Faulkhead, records do not need to be fixed in time and space, or separated from the event of their creation, to be records. Indeed, such narrow definitions of record that rely on fixity and materiality have resulted in white supremacist theories that fail to recognize oral, kinetic, or performative records *as records*, and in so doing, deem entire civilizations "record-free," or at least dependent solely on written colonial records to write history. "Societies without records," is how a prominent white male archival theorist dismissed multiple Indigenous communities and epistemologies at a recent conference, obliterating the validity of majority-world record keeping practices in one fell swoop.

Building on her significant work demonstrating the record-ness of dance and performance-based traditions, Tonia Sutherland traces the cultural and historical factors that cultivated still-thriving oral traditions in African American cultures. Rich African oral traditions, combined with white supremacist laws prohibiting and restricting Black literacy, produced the conditions under which orality became a primary mode of intergenerational knowledge and memory transfer.[85] As Sutherland shows, failing to recognize oral tradition as record has resulted in the de-legitimization of African American records, land claims among them, leading to land dispossession and a massive loss in intergenerational wealth transfer. Oral records, she convincingly argues, are *records*, and should be given their full evidentiary weight as such, rather than "fall[ing] into the gaps and vagaries of American archivy."[86] The consequences are not just conceptual; they are material. "What is at stake for African Americans in U.S. archival repositories," Sutherland writes,

> is historical knowledge free from the same colonial and white supremacist interpretations that deny any meaningful African American past outside the colonization of the African continent and enslavement on the American one. For African Americans to read their own history and identity against the grain of white, colonial, American archivy, alternate forms of epistemology are necessary.[87]

Separating "recordness" from fixity and materiality offers such alternate epistemological forms.

Jamie A. Lee, addressing queer temporalities in archives, refutes notions of records and or bodies as stable entities, instead writing that both bodies and records representing bodies can be "in states of becoming," or "stories so far."[88] Lee writes, "The archives holds bodies, records, collections, and bodies of knowledge that shift in contents and contexts posing challenges to notions of stability."[89] Lee guides us through some of the oral histories she conducted with trans and gender queer people for the Arizona Queer Archives and demonstrates how dominant Western

archival theory cannot accommodate or account for such "bodies in motion." To truly center queer and trans stories, Lee contends, we must build archives that "unsettle…the predominant notions that records are fixed," forcing archivists to reckon with "(un)becomings" that refuse fixity, linearity, and progression.[90]

For another example, Mustafa Saif, describing their work documenting queer and trans South Asian Americans as part of SAADA's Archival Creator's Fellowship, writes about decentering the genre of the coming out narrative, which has been the focal point of several participatory LBTQIA+ storytelling projects. The coming out narrative, Saif writes, "creates pressure to follow a single trajectory to become coherent to others, and centers some presumed straight audience to come out to."[91] Such coming out narratives are structured linearly: first a closeted past, then a confessional moment, and finally, a post-coming out liberation. Saif asserts that queer and trans South Asian Americans do not conform to such linear progress narratives, what we may call white time (following Mills) and/or heterotemporality (following Rifkin) earlier in this chapter. Writing at the end of a fellowship to document South Asian queer and trans people, Saif asserts,

> I initially assumed people would tell their stories linearly flowing from childhood through the present, but queer oral histories stitch together moments in surprising ways. Instead of simple linear trajectories, I am fascinated by these 'fuzzy' or 'nebulous' memories and the ways in which erasing or smudging memories can protect us from reliving difficult moments.[92]

The stories do not conform to white straight time; to fit them into that mold would be to commit chronoviolence.

As Faulkhead, Sutherland, Lee, and Saif show us, extricating records from the chronoviolence of the white temporal imaginary causes us to dispense with assumptions about linear temporality and material fixity, resulting in radical redefinitions of records and, in turn, archives. I purposefully do not propose here a single definition of record to take the place of that offered by the Society of American Archivists' glossary or by Geoffrey Yeo, but rather contend that multiple and conflicting definitions are necessary to make sense of varying cultural and political contexts. To impose a singular definition would further the epistemic violence imposed by white temporalities on communities of color and queer communities.

Yet I would not like to end there, in a seeming nod to archival pluralism's recognition of a multiplicity of definitions. In 2013, I defined archival pluralism as the acknowledgement of multiple, co-existing, and often-competing conceptualizations of records and archives.[93] Years later, I worry that the concept of archival pluralism might perform the very epistemological damage it seeks to avoid, that is, hoovering up incommensurable worldviews into a singular rubric without a strong-enough power analysis. Pluralism has become an assimilationist strategy when what we need is a radical rupture that fully haults, acknowledges, accounts for, and undoes the ongoing violences of colonialism, white supremacy, and hetero-patriarchy. Attempts to incorporate fluid, mobile, unfixed records into dominant archival structures will only further such violences, as J.J. Ghaddar has expertly

demonstrated in the Canadian context.[94] Liberatory memory work does not ask for a recognition, it demands a refusal. Here, I am refusing to be pinned down to a singular definition of a core concept; to do so would be a colonizing move. The beauty must rest in the difference.

As this chapter has argued, dominant Western archival theory relies on linear notions of time that cleave recordnesss to fixity and futurity and place archival use in a more just future yet-to-come. Such linear progress narratives enact a chronoviolence on oppressed people and emerge from the white temporal imaginary, culminating in a white construction of a post-racial future.

Critical race theory provides a powerful antidote to this white time, asserting the fallacy of racial progress narratives and instead uncovering how racial inequities are only rectified when doing so converges with the interests of white people, rather than due to the imagined inevitability of justice.

While there is no singular way to disentangle records from the chronoviolence of dominant Western archival theory, such extraction also requires that we reconceptualize archival *use* as well, shifting our imaginary about use from some vague, more-just future that might never come, *to now*. What does it mean to activate records to end cycles of oppression in the current political moment? What does liberatory memory work look like if there is no guarantee the future will be better than the past? If, as Derrick Bell posits, we are living through temporal repetitions of oppression rather than a linear progress narrative, what good are records? The next chapter turns to communities of color and queer communities served and represented by community archives in Southern California for some ideas.

Notes

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2 For other examples, see: the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration's strategic plan from 2006 to 2016, which was entitled, "Preserving the Past to Protect the Future," https://www.archives.gov/files/about/plans-reports/strategic-plan/2009/nara-strategic-plan-2006-2016-final.pdf; The Academy of Certified Archivists explains that archivists "act as agents of the present and the past for the future." Bruce Dearstyne, "The Archival Profession: Meeting Critical Institutional and Social Needs," https://www.certifiedarchivists.org/other-resources/articles/the-archival-profession-meeting-critical-institutional-and-social-needs/.

3 Charles W. Mills, "White Time: The Chronic Injustice of Ideal Theory," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 11(1) (2014): 27–42.

4 This is a refutation of the basic premise of the It Gets Better Project, https://itgetsbetter.org/. For a summary of critiques of this project, see: Sady Doyle, "Does 'It Gets Better' Make Life Better for Gay Teens?" *The Atlantic* (October 7, 2010), https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2010/10/does-it-gets-better-make-life-better-for-gay-teens/64184/.

5 Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

6 The time models described below do not map neatly on to the specific communities being studied in the subsequent chapters, but rather are invoked to illustrate the constraints of dominant Western archival theory and the possibilities for new theories.

7 Hinduism scholar Wendy Doniger asserts that in Hinduism time is simultaneously linear and cyclical, what she calls "a Mobius strip." Wendy Doniger, *On Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33.

8 There are a host of damaging assumptions-- and enforced expectations—about caste and gender roles and social hierarchy in this construction of the devolution of human virtue. Sumit Sarkar, "Rennaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth, and History in Colonial Bengal," in *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 98–126.
9 Tim Dowley, *A Brief Introduction to Hinduism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).
10 Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future* (London: Verso, 2019), 14–15.
11 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 201, 200.
12 Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 46.
13 Ibid., 2.
14 Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra M. DeBruyn, "The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief," *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8(2) (1988): 60–82.
15 Rifkin, 3.
16 Ibid., ix.
17 Ibid., X.
18 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 13.
19 Ibid., 20.
20 Ibid., 9.
21 Rasheedah Phillips, "Black Quantum Futurism," https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/.
22 Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts," *Social Text* 71(20:2) (Summer 2002): 1–15.
23 Rifkin 39.
24 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xxii.
25 Ibid., 3.
26 Ibid., 5.
27 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011), 2–3.
28 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 113.
29 heather love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 147.
30 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011), 98–99.
31 Abrahamic traditions are those that hold as central the story of Abraham, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
32 For a discussion of Obama's and King's uses of this quote, see Mychal Denzel Smith, "The Truth About 'The Arc of the Moral Universe," *Huffington Post* (January 18, 2018), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/opinion-smith-obama-king_n_5a5903e0e4b04f3c55a252a4. See also, Melissa Block interview with Clayborne Carson, "Theodore Parker and the 'Moral Universe,'" All Things Considered (September 2, 2010), https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129609461.
33 There are broad debates among Christian theologians about whether or not, prior to the return of Jesus, there will be a millennium of prosperity or suffering, and whether or not humans can act to hasten the coming of that millennium and if so, how, but all camps agree that time ends in the messiah's return.
34 Rifkin, 39.
35 Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 14–15.
36 Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India," 1853, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm.
37 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

38 Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.
39 Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," *Public Culture* 11(1) (1999): 253.
40 Hanchard, 257.
41 Charles W. Mills, "White Time: The Chronic Injustice of Ideal Theory," *Du Bois Review* 11(1) (2014): 28.
42 Rasheeda Phillips, "Time, Memory, and Justice in Marginalized Communities," presentation at The Social Life of Time: The First Temporal Belongings International Conference, June 6, 2018, Edinburgh. See also, "Black Quantum Futurism," https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/.
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44 Ibid., 31.
45 Ibid., 32.
46 Ibid., 37. He is writing specifically about Rawlsian ideal theory's failure to account for racism, but the critique applies more broadly to all white "post-racial" conceptions of justice.
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48 Ibid., 73.
49 Ibid., 74–75.
50 Ibid., 85.
51 Ibid., 33.
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Chapter 2

Community archives interrupting time[1]

Proceeding in the aftermath

Like many white progressive Americans, I was shocked by the disastrous 2016 US Presidential election. Just a few days before the election, I was in Sri Lanka, assuring a group of international memory workers brought together by the Nelson Mandela Foundation that we—Americans and the world—had nothing to worry about. "There is no way Trump will ever win," I told them all. The ensuing condolence messages came in from all over the world.

In the weeks and months that followed, it was difficult to know how best to proceed as an academic, particularly a white academic.[2] Do I continue research and teaching as planned? How best to shift direction to address our new changing realities? At that time, the research team I directed at UCLA's Community Archives Lab included graduate students who are gender queer, non-binary, disabled, Chicanx, and/or Asian American. How do I support my students and research partners in navigating terrifying unknowns impacting themselves and their communities when I myself am in a state of shock induced by my own white privilege?

Fall of 2016 also marked the start of a three-year research grant I received from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a US federal agency, to study the affective or emotional impact of marginalized identity-based community archives on the communities they serve and represent. It was my first major research grant after years of rejections from multiple funding agencies of prior iterations of proposals that sought to use the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) as a primary research site. These rejections claimed that that the proposed research was "too niche" due to its "narrow" focus on South Asian Americans, who were "too small" a community to have widely applicable significance, that I could not remain "neutral" or "objective" doing research at an organization I co-founded and continue to volunteer for, and/or that participant observation was not a valid method in library and information science. Many of these rejections reflected the then-lingering doubts about the legitimacy of community archives as institutions and apprehension about their practices as being sufficiently "archival" in the dominant Western sense of the term. As a result of this feedback, I decided to broaden the scope of my proposed research, focusing not just on SAADA, but on other community archives in Southern California, and to shift my methods from a more-detailed intensive ethnography at a single site to focus groups with users, staff, and

DOI: 10.4324/9781003001355-3

volunteers at multiple sites. The project that did eventually get funded had two goals: first, to confirm or refute if the findings of my previous research on the emotional impact of SAADA on South Asian American scholars was more broadly applicable to other minoritized communities and community archives; and second, to create a toolkit that would enable community archives to assess their own affective impact and guide them through the process of leveraging those findings for fundraising and marketing efforts.

After the 2016 US Presidential election, I wondered if such research would still be useful. More existentially, I began to ask: what good is research on community archives in the face of a white supremacist quasi-fascist regime taking control of my country? It is a question that I have been haunted by and that has guided my work ever since.

After the initial weeks of distress and scramble, my research team and I decided to proceed with our scheduled focus groups with community members served and represented by several community archives sites in Southern California. The sites included: La Historia Society (documenting what was until the 1980s a Mexican American farm-working community in El Monte, east of Los Angeles); the Little Tokyo Historical Society (documenting the history of Japanese Americans in downtown Los Angeles, both before and after forced removal, incarceration, and dispersion during World War II); Lambda Archives (preserving the LGBTQ+ history of San Diego); and the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine (documenting refugees and immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to the United States).[3]

These communities were in deep crisis in the wake of the election. Although we arrived at the focus groups with our pre-approved list of semi-structured interview questions about the emotional impact of absence, misrepresentation, and robust representation in archives, the discussions in all of the focus groups quickly turned to the election results. The fear, anger, and anxiety expressed were palpable. While each community had its own specific set of concerns based on the history and context of their community, across the board focus group participants made connections between past oppression their communities had suffered, ongoing oppression leading up to and in the wake of the election, and future imaginaries of oppression expected under the Trump regime. For these communities, time was playing out in cyclical, not linear terms. Across sites, we found a prevailing sense that community members were seeing history repeat itself, that historic trauma their communities had suffered not only was never addressed and redressed, but that the same oppressive tactics their communities experienced decades ago were being used in the current moment, that white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy were manifesting in the same ways as they had in the past, and that oppression that community elders had experienced as young people was happening to young people in their communities again now. And yet, across communities and identities, users of community archives also articulated conceptions of archives as spaces to connect past injustice with contemporary activism and possibilities, to disrupt cycles of oppression, and to hold each other accountable for imparting knowledge of and strategies for resistance to younger generations in the present. As these focus groups showed, community archives are more important than ever to communities

fighting the white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy surfaced by (but clearly extending before and beyond) Trump's election.

"Things swing back and forth"

One such community is served by Lambda Archives in San Diego, a two-hour road trip from Los Angeles down the Southern California coast. San Diego is known for being a politically conservative city, the home of US Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard bases, only 15 miles north of the US–Mexican border. What it is less well known for is its long LGBTQ+ history, a history commonly shared with other port cities across the world.

Lambda Archives collects, preserves, and shares the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBTQ+) history of San Diego County and Northern Baja California. Founded in 1987 with a few personal collections, the archives now stewards a broad range of materials dating back to the 1920s, including matchbooks from gay bars, sweaty t-shirts from pride parades, political buttons and banners, audio and video recordings, the personal papers of activists, and records from local LGBTQ+ organizations and political campaigns. Occupying a few office spaces off of a courtyard behind a popular community theater, it would be easy to miss Lambda Archives if not for a small purple sign. Once inside, visitors are greeted by a beautiful radiating red heart on a cloth banner that proclaims, "Welcome Blood Sisters." The banner honors the Blood Sisters, a group of lesbians who, in 1983, began organizing blood drives for patients suffering from AIDS after blood donations from gay men were banned by the federal government. The banner seems to announce to visitors: You are in a sacred space of LGBTQ+ solidarity rooted in a history of common struggle.

Sitting around a table in the Lambda library in February 2017, users of and volunteers for Lambda Archives were still reeling from Trump's recent inauguration. Frank Stefano, a community elder and board member, spoke about how many younger LGBTQ people, who came of age during the Obama administration, might not yet see the political significance of their own minoritized sexual orientations and gender identities. They might think, in Stefano's words, "So what, you're gay? Who cares?"[4] However, in Stefano's eyes, their identity would take on new meaning as their rights were "retrenched" under the then-new Trump administration.

Drawing a chilling parallel, Paul Detwiler, a filmmaker in his 40s working on a documentary entitled, "San Diego's Gay Bar History," responded to Stefano:

> I thought all the queers in the Weimar Republic probably thought things were fine. … They were like 'this is great, we're having a great time, we can do whatever [we want], and we're free and then it's like, kaboom.[5]

There was a sense that, once again, LGBTQ people were currently living through the kaboom moment.

Edith Benkov, a professor teaching a LGBTQ history class, responded with some additional context:

> You know, I always teach [the history of the Weimar Republic] and I was teaching that the night of the election… and I was like, well guys, this is really interesting but I'm really not talking about [Trump, I'm talking about Hitler]. It was very freaky. It was very very freaky. But I think when we came back the next week … and all these folks said this sounds like last week's lecture and I said yeah, you know these things swing back and forth so you have to kind of keep in mind, that [society] may have seemed really wonderful but just like the good old Weimar republic…[things changed].[6]

Benkov said she told the students that "things got better again," after the Nazi regime, but a sense of terror and dread permeated the Lambda Library where we were speaking. Focus group participants were clearly reeling from imagining how bad things may get for LGBTQ communities in the United States given their conception of how history repeats itself. As this exchange showed, Lambda focus group participants quickly dispensed with the dominant linear progress narrative that positioned the Obama administration's support for gay marriage as an irreversible milestone for LGBTQ liberation. Instead of unidirectional progress, they posited a cyclical repetition: freedom, oppression, freedom, and oppression. "Things swing back and forth," as Professor Benkov said, directly contradicting the "it gets better" ethos constructed by white and heteronormative time addressed in the previous chapter.

Focus group participants also conveyed a sense that elders in the community, those who have experienced the pendulum swinging before, had a duty to educate younger generations that each era, whether its marked by oppression or freedom, is temporary. Lambda's community members expressed hope that the archives become a catalyst for this kind of intergenerational dialogue. Angela Risi, a recent college graduate, was the only focus group participant at Lambda in her 20s. When asked what she learned from using archives, she said,

> I've learned that I, but also younger generations in general, have so much to learn from older generations. There really needs to be more work done on intergenerational communication and relationships… How else are we going to move forward if we don't know the history?

Archives, she said, can help younger queer people "move forward while still respecting the work that has been done in the past."[7]

Professor Benkov concurred, "This is the type of place that has the resources to show what happens when you have a political climate that is radically different from what it was two months ago or even two weeks ago."[8] The materials will take on new significance, Benkov predicted, as the Trump administration ushers in a new era of oppression. She said,

> The folks that are coming in to college now, they became adults under the Obama administration, which is not a typical administration, so there's a whole group of very innocent people because they lived through major changes that

> they don't yet realize were major changes… It is important for them to look back, to get in contact with some of the folks who were here and have been around, in order for them to understand our current situation.[9]

Bringing younger people into the archives can show how previous generations of LGBTQ activists fought oppression, so that younger people "can realize that things *can* be done because San Diego wasn't always this wonderful cheery place that we've lived in for the past eight years," Benkov said.[10]

Users of Lambda Archives also spoke of the organization as a site of political action, where they as individuals working with their communities are responsible for breaking cycles of oppression through activism. Importantly, Risi, gave a tangible example, positing that archival materials can inspire new acts of resistance by teaching key political strategies from the past. She said:

> … I found the meeting minutes of when the Gay Liberation Front was proposed to be passed as a recognized student organization and it was approved. That was a really neat thing to find. That was one thing I was really impressed by, especially with activism happening today. I think that people think that activists who came before our time were this entity that had power and control and were official, but the records show it's just a handful of people to get together and scribble some things down on a notepad and that it evolves into something you could never have foreseen… I don't know if [activists] are currently using [the archives] but I think certainly one way that they could use it is just as pure motivation to believe in the work that they're doing and see it is important, and… also to learn how activism has and hasn't been successful in this specific context of the city of San Diego, what tactics have worked, what haven't, or is there maybe a historic theme of police using certain strategies to try and regulate a movement such as permits or raids.[11]

Learning about and from past tactics and strategies and getting inspiration are two key ways that activists can use archives in the present. The focus of these conversations was not on vague potential future uses, but on activating records for activists *now*.

Notably, Risi also drew connections between anti-gay legislation from the past and Trump's then-new Muslim ban. She said:

> I can't help but see the parallels between laws that Trump is putting into place [and anti-gay legislation.] For example, the ban on people from the seven majority Muslim countries, and how the administration is saying this isn't a Muslim ban, but it effectively works as a Muslim ban, and how laws from the 50s and 60s were often explicitly anti-gay, but even if they weren't, they were crafted in a way to target the gay community. It's sneaky and manipulative and it's been happening for a long time.[12]

Risi, like other focus group participants, suggested that communities turn to archives to learn about and from past activist strategies in order to enact contemporary

strategies. Benkov concurred that Lambda has much of use to activists, because "the more you know about the past, you'll see things that are happening again, but we will know how to counteract things better if we see what was done before, especially in our own community."[13]

Although participants in the Lambda focus groups did not explicitly engage the theories of temporality discussed in the prior chapter, it was clear that they position Lambda's collections as evidence of ongoing cycles of oppression, rather than as points on a unidirectional linear progress narrative. The future wellbeing of the community was a source of anxiety, particularly under the uncertainty brought on by the new administration. A better future, in which LGBTQ communities could fully express their rights, was not seen as the inevitable next step in the procession of history, but rather a precarious possibility given the repetitive cycles of oppression LGBTQ communities have experienced throughout history.

As focus group participants at Lambda conceived, records do not mark singular unrepeatable moments in history, but rather, are in relationship with what I call *corollary records* documenting reoccurring moments in time in which the same or similar oppressions get repeated. A *corollary moment* is a point in time with historical precedence, where the pendulum swings back to the same place it had been before, to use Benkov's apt analogy. At their most useful, records can be activated in *corollary moments* in the present, so that community members can learn activist tactics and strategies and get inspiration to keep going, in the words of Risi. "We have been here before, we have survived this before, we have resisted before," corollary records assert, "*here's how*." By activating corollary records, Lambda's community members are interrupting that downward swinging pendulum of time, stopping, if only for a second, reoccurring oppressions by learning from previous generations of community members facing corollary moments. To impose a linear progress narrative on this community's imagining of time and records would enact a form of chronoviolence, as discussed in the previous chapter, and miss the community's creative formulations of queer temporalities.

The focus groups at Lambda Archives helped me rethink time in relation to archival theory. These conversations led me to reformulate the concept of *archival imaginary* that I have been thinking through for almost a decade. In a 2014 book chapter, I defined the archival imaginary as "the dynamic ways communities creatively and collectively re-envision the future through archival interventions in representations of the shared past."[14] In that formulation, past precedent was constructed as crucial for future action, highlighting the necessity and urgency of recuperative projects that bring to light previously unknown records created by minoritized communities. In a later article coauthored with Anne Gilliland, we proposed the term "impossible archival imaginaries" to describe the ways in which minoritized communities conjure up records that do not actually exist as a way to correct stories about the past, fill in silences, and/or achieve legal justice or accountability.[15] More recently, in an article spearheaded by my research team member Gracen Brilmyer based on data from the same focus groups I am reporting on here, we posited the term "reciprocal archival imaginaries" to denote "the circular, continually entangled relationships between archival users, their imaginaries, and

community-based archives."[16] In other words, minoritized communities and the archives that serve and represent them dynamically co-constitute each other over time, continually re-defining and shifting based on ever-changing notions of belonging, boundaries, and identities.

The conversations I had at Lambda led me to complicate the linear temporality undergirding my initial construction of the archival imaginary. If historical time is cyclical rather than linear, as the users of Lambda suggested, traces of the past are not activated to envision a distant (and wholly uncertain) future, but rather to mark corollary moments, or reoccurring points, in the now. In this way, records pinpoint the repetition of histories of oppression, rather than discrete, contained moments on an irreversible progressive march ending in liberation. We must shift the focus, then, of the archival imaginary, from some future moment to the present, as users of archives search for past corollaries to their current situation through archival use. Users activate these records now, not earmark them for the future. The imaginary is not forthcoming; it is already happening. We are living through the downswing of the pendulum, passing the corollary moment from the past as we travel back and forth across time. Activating corollary records helps interrupt the cycle of oppression, if only for a moment.

"Most of the stuff that's happening today, its already been done"

Back in Los Angeles, the notion of corollary records and corollary historical moments resonated with a different community. At La Historia Society, an intergenerational group of Mexican American volunteers is dedicated to preserving the century-old history of farmworkers in the *barrios* (neighborhoods) of El Monte, east of Los Angeles.[17] An independent, community-driven organization, La Historia Society was founded in 1998 by the descendants of Mexican American farmworkers in response to the silences and gaps of the official city-run El Monte Historical Museum only a block away.

The two organizations are a study in contrast. La Historia Society operates out of a two-room cinderblock building right off the 10 Expressway. Its walls are covered with photographs from the city's nine *barrios,* military and graduation portraits of community members, and family snapshots. The space feels like home.[18] Conversely, El Monte Historical Museum occupies a large, old Spanish-style villa adjacent to a sprawling civic center. El Monte Historical Museum's motto is "*protecting* our future while preserving our past." (Emphasis mine.) (One can't help but ask: *whose* future are you protecting *from whom*? And subsequently, *whose* history are you preserving *for whom*?) Many La Historia Society members describe El Monte Historical Museum as exclusionary, telling the town's history from the white pioneer and farm-owners' perspective. As one elder volunteering for La Historia Society said about El Monte Historical Museum, "Over there, we don't exist. At the other museum, it's just *the other people*."

Like the focus groups at Lambda Archives, those at La History Society quickly turned to the anxieties about the then-nascent Trump administration. Members of

La Historia Society (the organization is membership-based) expressed fear over the new administration and drew connections between oppression Latinx people are now experiencing and oppression experienced by their grandparents' or parents' generations decades ago. Here too, time was constructed cyclically, the past repeated in the present.

Dolores Haro, past president of La Historia Society, began by speaking about heightened threats of deportation under the new administration, and how these threats echoed her own family's history:

> What's going on now, and the fear, you see it in the news every day. I think of how my grandpa and grandma felt when they came from Mexico… and how the community helped each other then… I feel for the people now out there protesting [deportations]… I'm thinking, how would my grandparents have survived it? I think about the people that are being deported and what would have happened to my family, if that would have happened to my grandpa, where all their children were born here and then the parents were being deported. And so I think now more than ever our museum could be even more important for people to understand… how to be righteous, and [seek] justice for people that came over here to have a better living for their families.[19]

La History Society President Rosa Peña built on the connections Haro made between past and present. She said:

> You don't realize how it repeats itself if you don't learn the history… If you don't know, even in like the 1940s, Americans that were of Mexican descent were sent back to Mexico. Like, it could happen again this time, because somebody that's searching for a Mexican is not going to see a Mexican American, they're just going to see a Mexican or a Latino … just like they did back then, they're just going to round them up, just like they did with the Japanese…[20]

As at Lambda, community members were making connections not only across time in their own communities, but also drawing parallels to racism other communities have experienced or are experiencing as well.

Jazmin de la Cruz, a young college student and volunteer, echoed Peña's thoughts about the cyclical nature of oppression. She said:

> like Rosa said, history repeats itself, [but] it can be stopped if you know the history. Today, deportation, Trump, all that stuff that's going on, [people are] just like, 'oh they can't do that!' But most of the stuff that's happening today, its already been done. But [community members] don't know that history, because they don't come in through the door. That's what we do here…We need to get people in through these doors, and that's what we try to do every day.[21]

De la Cruz perfectly encapsulated the notion that archives can stop oppression occurring in real time by connecting the past to the present.

Focus group participants at La Historia Society seemed to be in agreement that preserving and educating young people about the community's history is a way to resist and intervene in cycles of racism and state violence. One participant spoke about the organization existing, "to build not just this past history, but future history."[22] Similarly, another community elder explained, "Now it's up to me to share [this history with] younger people… I want to make sure I give life to my younger generation so they can continue. We have our responsibility to keep our community alive."[23] The two younger focus group participants seemed eager to take up this mantle. One responded, "We're that bridge to history and to the past and the present." Another concurred, "*We're* history in the making. This *here* [pointing at the focus group participants], history in the making."[24] By educating younger generations, community elders were holding each other accountable in terms of interrupting ongoing oppression.[25]

Like the community served and represented by Lambda Archives, that of La Historia Society refused any simplistic unidirectional progress narratives about their community's history. Rather than posit racism as a thing of the past or assert how far the community has come from its impoverished roots, community members expressed the ongoing nature of racism experienced by Latinx communities, with successive waves of immigrants and generations of family members experiencing similar oppression across space and time. Focus group participants constructed the current moment as a corollary moment to when their own ancestors immigrated to the United States decades ago. Furthermore, focus group participants also constructed the records at La Historia Society as corollary records that could be activated in the present to interrupt the repetition of oppressive histories, if only more people walked in "through these doors." As at Lambda Archives, at La Historia Society, we saw community members, particularly younger community members, articulate a longing for archives to be *more* political, to be used by *more* people for *more* activist aims to address ongoing oppression. To assert that the political conditions for La Historia Society's community will inevitably get better over time would enact a form of chronoviolence on the ways that community members constructed their own past, present, and future. Progress is for white people living in white time; it does not reflect the actual experiences of racialized communities in the United States.

Interestingly, focus group participants at La Historia Society were not, by and large, immigrants themselves, but the children or grandchildren of immigrants who came to work at El Monte's farms generations ago. While they saw themselves as separate or distinct from recent Latin American immigrants to California, they were clear that their own imaginaries of difference would be collapsed in the face of racist structures like US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Furthermore, participants' imaginaries about reoccurring oppression were not limited to their own community, but expanded to include other racialized communities like Japanese Americans.

Most importantly, the participation of younger generations of Mexican Americans in La Historia Society was seen as a crucial way to interrupt cycles of violence in the future. The younger members see themselves as bridges, not to the

future *but to the present*, stressing they are "history in the making," a process happening right now, not in the future. By activating corollary records created in corollary moments in the community's history, members of La Historia Society saw themselves enacting a better *present* for their community.

"Re-coinciding our present with our past"

Another batch of focus group took us south to Orange County. Just south of Los Angeles, Long Beach has the country's largest Cambodian community. Just south of Long Beach is Orange County, home to the largest Vietnamese community in the United States. Located within Orange County, the University of California, Irvine, draws heavily on these local communities. In 1987, a UCI librarian formed the Southeast Asian Archive (SEAA) as a collaboration with community members. Unlike the other focus groups sites described in this chapter, SEAA is formally part of a university and is located quite centrally on campus, part of a complex of university library buildings. Expertly led by archivist Thuy Vo Dang, SEAA documents the experiences of refugees and immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, including but not limited to "the American War," their journeys toward resettlement, and their lives in the United States. While SEAA is part of UCI, I contend that it is still a community-based archives because the archivist is a member of the community being documenting, the collaborative nature of the collecting between the archivist and local Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian communities, and the high degree of autonomy community members have in making decisions about the collections.[26]

At SEAA, as in the other sites, focus group participants found corollaries between the past and present historic moment. Our focus groups there included second and third generation Vietnamese American and Cambodian American college students, recent graduates, Asian American studies professors, writers, and artists. Here, college students and recent graduates were quite vocal about how materials from the archives gave them crucial context to understand their own families and communities in the past and in the present. Several participants drew parallels between the political debate surrounding the entry of Southeast Asian refugees to the United States in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and current US policy regarding the admission of refugees from other parts of the world. They also discussed the history of Southeast Asian immigration to the United States in the context of the ongoing deportation of Cambodian Americans, which they rightfully predicted would increase under the Trump administration. Throughout these discussions, official US policy toward refugees and white Americans' attitudes about immigration more broadly were addressed as repetitive cycles rather than linear progressions.

Andy Le, a recent graduate of UCI and an outreach advisor at the Student Outreach and Retention Center on campus, described how he used materials from the archives to educate Southeast Asian American students about the history of their community's political activism on campus as a way to inspire ongoing activism. One record in particular, a painting depicting a Vietnamese refugee crying tears of blood awaiting news of relocation, resonated with Le. He said the painting:

> helped me understand, as a student, where my roots came from, and it also resonated with other Southeast Asian students that have the similar themes of trauma, displacement and war within their own history… We've used that piece to participate in the [UCI] Cross-Cultural Center's festival; the theme was 'then and now.' Using that piece, we were connecting themes of current deportation process within the Cambodian community, and then also other communities, as well as a reminder of the current existing struggle. It was a very important piece. We also used it for a special ceremony called the Southeast Asian Graduation' [in 2014]… We wanted to recognize family members that weren't able to attend that ceremony because of struggles [related to] deportation. We worked with [the organization] Studio Revolt to have [Cambodian poet and activist] Kosal Khiev speak specifically to current issues. We used that time to not only unite other individuals with these similar stories, but to create more of a political stance and consciousness that these issues are still existing within the system that we live in. As these students graduate, they are focusing on different post-graduation pathways, and hopefully within those career choices, they implement social justice platforms and ways to advocate for the Southeast Asian community in general.[27]

In Le's comments, we can see how past traumas reoccur, how activism in the present draws on knowledge gained from the past, and how younger generations construct future trajectories for themselves and their communities. Archival use, for Le, is inherently political, as he sees the SEAA as a place for students to "share their stories as a process of healing, as a process of creating a movement, and also just creating this consciousness" about being Southeast Asian American. He continued, that, in connecting students to materials in the archives, "my commitment and passion was to create a safe and supportive space for students so that they can be resilient and empowered by this collective history."[28]

Similarly, at a different focus group at SEAA, Kevin Duc Pham, a Vietnamese American undergraduate student, spoke about using a collection of records created by Vietnamese refugees awaiting relocation in camps. Learning about these refugees made Kevin think about intergenerational trauma in his own family. He said:

> It makes me very emotional. I've teared up a couple of times just seeing what these people went through… just knowing how I'm still affected by it, how lots of members of my community are still affected by it. Seeing how all these people were put into these refugee camps, these re-education camps, all the ways that they suffered, all the ways that they've tried so hard to come out and reach America and how, even though they have started a new life here, a lot of them are still affected by what had happened before. I see a lot in my own family, how they're experiencing things like PTSD because... they're victims of war and they went through all these horrible, traumatic experiences and I'm still affected by it, and a lot of other people I know are still affected by it too. [Using the archives] definitely helps re-coincide our present with our past, so that we're able to move forward towards the future.[29]

To "re-coincide our present with our past" indicates a cyclical realignment of reoccurring and ongoing trauma that must be addressed in order to move ahead. Here we see how archives are activated as a way to interrupt cycles of violence; it is only through a "re-coinciding" of past and present that a future can be imagined in the present.

Like Andy, Kevin drew parallels between past and current debates regarding US immigration policy. In this regard, he said the archives "might be *too* current." He continued, "The stories of these refugees [in the archives] are very much parallel to the story of refugees now. We're seeing very similar situations."[30] Another focus group participant, educator, and oral historian Tram Le chimed in, emphasizing similarities between century-old anti-Asian sentiment and contemporary Islamophobia. She said, "It's very, very similar; 67% of Americans [in the 1970s] said that Vietnamese refugees would come over and take over all their jobs. Almost nothing has changed… They still say immigrants will bring disease, again. Just replace "communist" with "extreme Islamist" or "terrorist," and it's the same."[31] Here, as in the other sites, focus group participants drew clear lines between trauma their own community has or is suffering and that experienced by other minoritized groups, particularly Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim under the then-new Trump administration.

As in the other sites, the notions of corollary moments and corollary records resonated at SEAA, as participants made connections between the past and present in their own communities, and their communities and those of other racialized groups. For this community, clear corollaries emerge between the racism suffered by older generations of refugees and immigrants and the racism currently being experienced by Cambodian Americans facing deportation or Muslims threatened with surveillance, exclusion, and registration. Activating records from past corollary moments in the present empowered young Vietnamese Americans like Le and Pham to not only understand more about their own families and communities, but also inspire others "to create more of a political stance" in the words of Le. In this way, archives become a significant site of solidarity-building across minoritized communities, even as they can foster relationships across generations within the same community.

The political potential of archives was most explicit at SEAA. Dorothy Fujita-Rony, a professor of Asian American Studies and a focus group participant, spoke at length about the tension between the importance of representation in archives for minoritized communities and more overt political consciousness. She said:

> As important as it is to find your own community, your own family [in archives]... I don't want to take away from the profound significance of that, because for a lot of people.... that immediacy, it's something that you feel in your soul, right? But... I want to have us think more broadly about the political project… I want to encourage us… first to recognize that 'Southeast Asia' is a contested category… What I want to move to is thinking about the Southeast Asian Archives [as] … a generative political space… I've worked in a number of projects where literally, I was curating the exhibitions or showing the photographs where people could recognize [themselves]. So that's a profound moment; … I really don't want to take away from that, but... I just want to think of how [the archives] could be generative in other ways.[32]

For Fujita-Rony, exactly what form that political intervention might take is still open for discussion, but she considers the archives "a mobilizing space." She continued:

> I think it is a journey that we're moving through to figure it out. And I think that's why the Southeast Asian Archives is so important. Not just to protect things that we know would be thrown away [otherwise]… That is this incredible … strategic intervention. … We're preserving it for the next generation, right? But at the same time also… it's a politically generative space. So that we can continue this kind of dialogue and debate… I think it's really a space of considerable power… and part of it is because it is this repository… that someone can come in and really be drawn in, really have... a life-changing moment... What could be more profound than to be able to connect with a part of your past that you didn't know, that isn't talked about? And then to be able to move that forward to a dialogue. So I think the political project with Southeast Asian Americans… is being really articulated now… It's a politically generative space in different ways for different communities.[33]

Importantly, Fujita-Rony did not downplay the importance of "representational belonging," what I have described elsewhere as that feeling of seeing yourself and your community robustly represented after being symbolically annihilated in archives. But she wanted *more* from archives than just representational belonging; she wanted the community to transform those moments of self-recognition into political consciousness and, ultimately, action.

SEAA seemed to succeed in catalyzing those transformative moments for at least some of the undergraduate students who participated in the focus groups. Kevin Duc Pham, for example, noted how important SEAA has been for his own consciousness as an Asian American activist. Pham said:

> I've always thought in the past, "Oh, I've always been a feminist, I've always been a queer activist, so on and so forth. But I've never really been an Asian activist, just because... Why do I need to do that?" But going through these archives, seeing all of these things, and especially, drawing parallels with the current political climate, and landscape, I'm definitely… starting to become more of an Asian activist and I'm starting to reach out more and draw more awareness and find other people who believe in the same things I believe in, just to help create all these new social movements and all this political activism. At the very least, just being able to be in this space and looking at all this stuff, it can spark that in a lot of other people. It can help them realize we had problems before that are still problems now for us and we need to do something about it... Having people be more aware of this space and the fact that this is here can help spark that conversation and help lead it forward…So, I do think spaces like this are important, allowing, especially the newer generations, allowing them to become more political and allowing them to assert their own activism and their own agendas.[34]

For Pham, interacting with archives might have begun with that initial recognition, but that sense of representational belonging was quickly catalyzed into a political consciousness, a transformation he would like to see "sparked" in others.

Among users of SEAA, I saw a refusal to adhere to linear progress narratives that uphold Asian Americans as "model minorities" or valorize their biographies as success stories, to the detriment of other racialized groups in the United States. Rather than reproducing a dominant story about how Southeast refugees came to the United States, started successful businesses, and assimilated, the community coalescing around SEAA articulated a view of their communities as "unsettled," to use the term of critical refugee studies scholar Eric Tang, their status as fully American constructed as temporary and revocable.[35] SEAA users drew connections between US militarism at home and abroad (what Dorothy Fujita-Rony describes as "militarized rupture"), between debates about immigration from the past decades and the ongoing deportation of Cambodian Americans, between the struggles of their own communities and other communities of color.[36] As at other sites, there was a prevailing sense that corollary records *could be* activated to interrupt reoccurring oppression and a distinct desire for more of that activation to happen in the present.

"It could very well happen again"

Back in Los Angeles, the Little Tokyo Historical Society (LTHS) is one of a constellation of Japanese American memory organizations reclaiming space in the face of white gentrification downtown. Little Tokyo's Japanese American residents were forcibly evacuated from their then-thriving community to prison camps during World War II, as President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 mandated the forced removal of 110,000 Americans of Japanese descent from the West Coast in 1942. While Los Angeles's Japanese American population dispersed after the War, the Little Tokyo neighborhood remains a center of commercial and cultural activity for Japanese Americans. Though few focus group participants grew up in Little Tokyo, many recall returning there each weekend to shop, eat, attend temple, and socialize.

LTHS was founded in 2006 to preserve the history and contributions of Japanese and Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo. As part of its mission, Little Tokyo Historical Society "focuses on researching and discovering the historical resources, stories, and connections of sites, buildings, and events related to Little Tokyo as an ethnic heritage neighborhood."[37] What differentiates the Little Tokyo Historical Society from similar organizations (like the nearby Japanese American National Museum) is the focus on documenting the history and culture of Little Tokyo only as opposed to documenting the history of Japanese Americans across Los Angeles, throughout California, or nationwide. As such, the community archives coalesces around both an ethnic and geographic identity.

LTHS's monthly meetings are so well-attended that they must be held down the street from the archives' small storefront space, at a local travel agency on the second floor of a busy Japanese mall known for its trendy restaurants, bakeries, and manga stores. Arriving early one Saturday morning in January 2017 to observe the meeting and conduct a focus group, my research team members and I must have

looked out of place. A community elder, suspicions raised by the recent election, set his eyes on us and asked, "Are you a spy?" before passing around a sign-in sheet. We awkwardly laughed it off, introducing ourselves as researchers from UCLA, but the question stuck. What newcomers with clipboards can be trusted in this new context after Trump's election?

Once we were properly vouched for, LTHS focus groups participants were also eager to talk about the election. Here, Japanese American community members addressed the parallels between the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and the formation of racist policies toward those perceived to be Muslim under the Trump administration. It was clear from these conversations that the racism that community elders experienced has not ended, but rather shifted, from one generation to the other, from one community to the other.

Focus group participants talked about the present moment, where Trump had just taken office and was formulating his "Muslim ban," as a corollary moment to the forced evacuation and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Michael Okamura, a former banker and president of the LTHS board, said:

> Talk about political relevance; this year marks the 75th anniversary of executive order 9066 [in which President Roosevelt ordered Japanese Americans into incarceration]. So I think an historic argument can be made that this happened to a group of people 75 years ago and it could very well happen again. I think the Japanese American community, using its background… can go back to that era to use that knowledge, that powerful knowledge, that this can't happen again. This community here has walked in solidarity with the Muslim American community. They've had vigils, even back to 9/11, to use the experiences that the Japanese American community went through to help all other immigrant communities.[38]

Similarly, another LTHS participant, Shelly Niimi, talked about the importance of community elders speaking out about their experiences surviving incarceration as children in light of ongoing Islamophobia. She said:

> part of [the story of internment has been] covered up because of the cultural thing to not talk about negative things, but it was a bad experience that we don't want to happen to other people. [We don't want] that same mistake happening to Muslims after 9/11… I feel like it's really sort of honorable that [the elders] are talking about [internment] so much now because that's helping Muslim people, to fight that Muslim ban, so it's like even more of an honorable thing to do even though it's culturally uncomfortable.[39]

Jeffrey Chop, who is a well-known Asian American activist involved in LTHS, responded that he admired, "the bravery of the Japanese community to speak up," and noted that "the Japanese American community were certainly among the first people to stand in support of Muslims under attack, and also in support of Black Lives Matter."[40]

Also at LTHS, Kristen Hayashi, a doctoral student at University of California, Riverside, studying the forcible displacement and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, said:

> I never thought my research would have a lot of relevance today, but there have been a lot of inaccurate, irresponsible and, just ignorant comments that have been made by people working for the President,… saying that there is a precedent for a Muslim registry, and looking towards [Japanese American] incarceration again, saying that it's been done in the past, maybe we can look to that for future reference. It's just shocking to me.[41]

However, Hayashi continued that, if Trump cabinet members who are looking toward Japanese American incarceration as a model for how to treat Muslims

> actually looked at archives, if they saw letters of people standing up for Japanese Americans about how wrong [incarceration] was, if they saw photographs of the conditions inside the camps, if they actually took some time to do research before making these comments or setting policy, things would be a lot different.[42]

At LTHS, I saw how participants activated archives to forge corollary moments across communities, in this case Japanese American and Muslim. Participants' archival imaginaries led them to find corollary moments between past and present and other communities' experiences and their own. By invoking corollary records, records from the past that echo the current moment, LTHS community members saw remembering, preserving, and activating records for storytelling as a way to break the cycle of oppression, to be responsible *to* the past *in* the present.

Historical corollaries and their limits

The four sites of these focus groups—Lambda Archives, La Historia Society, Little Tokyo Historical Society, and the Southeast Asian Archive—represent and serve very different communities, each with their own historical-cultural-political contexts, worldviews, and traditions. Yet, across these communities, participants were eager to connect archives with the politics of the Trump administration, seeing historical corollaries in the archives between the past and the present moment. Participants at each site questioned dominant linear temporalities by referring to time as a repetitive cycle in which oppression reoccurs across generations and communities. Archival work, for them, was about finding corollary records to the present moment that can be activated for activist strategies and inspirations, rather than as evidence of an inevitable unfolding of historical progress.

At the core of each community's understanding of its past and present is a notion of repeating oppression. From police raids on gay bars to ICE raids on Latinx immigrants, from incarceration in camps during World War II to waiting for relocation in refugee camps in Southeast Asia, each community viewed itself through

experiences of oppression. Across sites, focus group participants expressed a prevailing sense that the historic trauma their own communities had suffered not only was never addressed and redressed, but that the same oppressive tactics communities experienced decades ago were being used in the current moment.

The communities served and represented by the sites explored in this chapter rejected the progress narratives embedded in white heteronormative time. For them, history was, if not exactly repeating itself, returning to corollary moments across corollary minoritized communities as documented in corollary records.

To be clear, the communities from the focus groups we held in Southern California do not necessarily map onto the same ontologies and epistemologies of temporality addressed in Chapter 1. Black and Indigenous communities, for example, were not the subjects of my team's focus group research. The prior chapter's overview of cyclical temporalities was not meant to foreshadow the specific findings presented in this chapter, but rather, to show the range and depth of cyclical temporalities and how such temporalities challenge dominant white conceptions of time and definitions of record. While the communities discussed in this chapter and the ontologies and epistemologies described in the prior chapter do not perfectly align, it is clear that dominant conceptions of time and record do not fully resonate with any of the communities addressed in either chapter. No one at any of the four community archives sites articulated what the previous chapter called heteronormative time (following Rifkin) or white time (following Mills), that is, time as an inevitable march toward progress.

Accordingly, no one described what we might call a heteronormative or white conception of records as fixed material evidence of discrete finished moments. The chronoviolence embedded in dominant Western archival theory fails to account for the differing temporalities, and corresponding constructions of records, found at these sites of empowerment for minoritized communities. Instead of the fixity and futurity embedded in dominant Western archival definitions of records, users of these four community archives articulated a very different conception of records, one that hinges on shifting relationships over time—relationships between corollary moments in the past and present, between generations within a community, between their own community and other communities experiencing oppression. Furthermore, focus group participants expressed a longing that these materials be activated now, for discrete political action in the present, not by unknown users in an unknown future. In this regard, they articulated a *temporality of urgency*, in which communities experience immediate needs for the records to be used. *How* the records could be used for activism in the present was the subject of much discussion, even aspirational longing.

As participants across sites expressed anger and frustration at the repetition of traumatic histories, they also expressed the possibility that activating corollary records in the present could interrupt cycles of hetero-patriarchy and white supremacy. This possibility of using archives in the present to interrupt cycles of oppression, was often expressed as a wistful ambition rather than a reflection of current reality. In this way, these four community archives sites might be seen as sources of as-of-yet unrealized potential for political resistance. At Lambda, for example, even as Angela Risi laid out a perfect agenda for activist uses of archives,

she prefaced it by saying she did not know if archivists "are currently using" records in that way.[43] Similarly, at La Historia Society, Jazmin de la Cruz lamented that more community members did not "come in through these doors" to learn the community's history. And at SEAA, Dorothy Fujita-Rony really pushed to move beyond the politics of self-recognition toward a more "mobilizing" space. Participants at all four sites described the moment when this transformation happened for them, when seeing themselves represented in archives catalyzed a greater political consciousness and, in some cases, political activism. Yet participants also articulated an opening, a gap between the political potential of archives and the reality of indifference or apathy in some community members. There was an inherent assumption that learning *about* one's own community would easily translate into learning *from* one's own community, in the sense that gaining more historical knowledge would lead to lessons more broadly applicable to the current moment and to corollary communities. Yet for many, the full potential of community archives to serve as "politically generative spaces" was not yet completely realized.

Forging corollary moments, while important, was not enough for some participants. At several sites, there was a subtle questioning of past strategy in the current moment. This was most apparent at LTHS. For decades, Japanese American elders bravely devoted time to educating the public about the traumas they suffered during incarceration, risking their own re-traumatization in telling their stories. (I personally have benefited from these educational efforts and distinctly remember a survivor speaking to my high school history class.) However, these educational efforts assume that if white Americans only *knew* about Japanese American incarceration and how awful it was, they would empathize with Japanese Americans and make sure not to repeat inflicting the same trauma. The Trump administration's invocation of Japanese American incarceration, not as an unmitigated humanitarian disaster, but as a model or precedent that could and should be followed, rattled basic assumptions LTHS community members had regarding outreach and education about incarceration as a political strategy. It also produced a kind of existential crisis about the uses of archives. While one participant asserted that the archives contain "facts and data that can be used for action," another quickly quipped that the then-new administration does not value the "facts and data" found in archives. If archives preserve facts, and facts are no longer important under the new administration, what good are archives? If activating records induces empathy, and empathy is no longer useful as a political tool, what good are records?

I found myself, and other archivists and educators, engaging in this same quandary in the wake of the Trump election; could we *educate* our students *out* of white supremacy? By invoking Japanese American incarceration as a model to be replicated, as an *aspirational* rather than *tragic* corollary moment, the Trump administration was surfacing a fundamental truth about white supremacy: it is ultimately about power, not ignorance.[44] White supremacists cannot be educated into empathy, because a lack of empathy is not the primary problem; inequitable distribution of power is. Thus, white supremacists are acting out of self-interest in maintaining power. Here, I am reminded of the assertions of Derrick Bell and other racial pessimists described in the previous chapter that under the current white supremacist

system, discrete legal, financial, and civic gains for Black people are only made when they converge with the interests of whites, a concept known as interest convergence.[45] If white supremacy is fundamentally about self-interest, how can white archivists and educators (like me) convince other white people it is in our best interests to dismantle white supremacy?

These questions push me beyond liberal formulations that emphasize the inherent value of education in producing a sense of cross-racial empathy that magically eradicates oppression. Empathy without a power analysis is grossly insufficient; it is an individual solution for a structural problem.

I also walked away from these focus groups thinking more deeply about *for whom* community archives exist. I have often asserted that the primary audience for minoritized identity-based community archives is the community itself represented, be that BIPOC or LGBTQ+, and not the generic, presumably white straight scholarly researchers assumed by university and government repositories. The participants at these sites underscored the importance of community archives serving their own communities and not pandering to white or straight outsiders who might twist histories of resistance into progress narratives, or even worse, into strategies for consolidating power and repeating oppression.

Participants at these focus groups fundamentally reshaped my own conception of time and definition of records. They also changed how I conceive of my own archival practice at SAADA, catalyzing a sense of urgency in me regarding how we encourage more—and more political—activation of the records in our care in the present. It is not enough to collect, digitize, and make accessible records documenting the histories of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities—we must catalyze those records for activism, for an interruption in cyclical oppression. In these ways, the focus groups were more transformative for me as an archivist and scholar than a decade of reading dominant Western archival theory. But, like many of the focus group participants, I was also left wanting *more* from archives: more connections across corollary records, moments, and communities; more activation of records for political activism; more liberatory longings and consummations. How do we shift the conversation from a focus on a single historical figure like the President, however awful, to the underlying forces of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy that produced and enable him? How do we move from making connections across repetitions of oppression to dismantling that oppression? How do we enact liberatory memory work? I will explore those questions over the next two chapters.

Notes

1 Some data from this chapter was originally reported in Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, Gracen Brilmyer, and Jimmy Zavala, "'Carry It Forward': Community-Based Conceptualizations of Accountability," In *Defining a Discipline: Essays in Honor of Richard Cox*, eds. Elizabeth Yakel and Jeannette Bastian (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020), 48–61. Data presented in this chapter was collected and coded by the 2016–2017 UCLA Community Archives Lab research team, including Joyce Gabiola, Gracen Brilmyer, and Jimmy Zavala.

2 I have written about teaching in the wake of the 2016 election. Michelle Caswell (with graphic design by Gracen Brilmyer), "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in the Archives Classroom," *Library Quarterly* 87(3) (2017), special issue "Aftermath: Libraries and the U.S. Election": 222–235.
3 There was a fifth research site, a local history organization that was not based on a minoritized identity. Data from that site is not included here.
4 Frank Stefano, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
5 Paul Detwiler, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
6 Edith Benkov, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
7 Angela Risi, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
8 Edith Benkov, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
9 Edith Benkov, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
10 It was surprising to see how many focus group participants at Lambda Archives held the Obama administration in such high esteem, constructing the past 8 years as a utopic time. Although gay marriage was legalized under the administration, many trans and queer activists denounce the focus on gay marriage as an assimilationist strategy and would instead point to the proliferation of deportations and mass incarceration under the Obama administration as deeply troubling trends. For an example, see: Dean Spade, *Normal Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).
11 Angela Risi, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
12 Ibid.
13 Edith Benkov, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
14 Michelle Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives," In *Identity Palimpsests: Ethnic Archiving in the U.S. and Canada* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014), 49.
15 Anne Gilliland and Michelle Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined," *Archival Science* 16(1) (2016): 53–75.
16 Gracen Brilymer, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, and Michelle Caswell, "Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries: The Shifting Boundaries of 'Community' in Community Archives," *Archivaria* 88 (Fall 2019): 6–48.
17 For detailed histories of El Monte, see: Romeo Guzmán, Carribean Fragoza, Alex Sayf Cummings, and Ryan Reft, *East of East: The Making of Greater El Monte* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020).
18 Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, Gracen Brilmyer, Jimmy Zavala and Marika Cifor, "Imagining Transformative Spaces: The Personal-Political Sites of Community Archives," *Archival Science* 18(1) (2018): 73–93.
19 Dolores Haro, Focus Group at La Historia Society, El Monte, CA, February 18, 2017.
20 Rosa Peña, Focus Group at La Historia Society, El Monte, CA, February 18, 2017.
21 Jazmin de la Cruz, Focus Group at La Historia Society, El Monte, CA, February 18, 2017.
22 Unidentified participant, Focus Group at La Historia Society, El Monte, CA, February 18, 2017.
23 Unidentified participant, Focus Group at La Historia Society, El Monte, CA, March 18, 2017.
24 Jazmin de la Cruz, Focus Group at La Historia Society, El Monte, CA, February 18, 2017.
25 Michelle Caswell, Joyce Gabiola, Gracen Brilmyer, and Jimmy Zavala, "'Carry It Forward': Community-Based Conceptualizations of Accountability," In *Defining a Discipline: Essays in Honor of Richard Cox,* eds. Elizabeth Yakel and Jeannette Bastian (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020), 48–61.
26 UCI SEAA describes itself as a "community-centered" archives. UCI, "Defining Community-Centered Archives Since 1987," https://ocseaa.lib.uci.edu/community_archives.
27 Andy Le, Focus Group, Southeast Asian Archive at University of California, Irvine, November 2016.
28 Andy Le, Focus Group, Southeast Asian Archive at University of California, Irvine, November 2016.

29 Kevin Duc Pham, Focus Group at Southeast Asian Archive, University of California at Irvine, Irvine, CA, February 3, 2017.
30 Ibid.
31 Tram Le, Focus Group at Southeast Asian Archive, University of California at Irvine, Irvine, CA, February 3, 2017.
32 Dorothy Fujita-Rony, Focus Group at Southeast Asian Archive, University of California at Irvine, Irvine, CA, February 3, 2017.
33 Ibid.
34 Kevin Duc Pham, Focus Group at Southeast Asian Archive, University of California at Irvine, Irvine, CA, February 3, 2017.
35 Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2015).
36 Dorothy Fujita-Rony, "Illuminating Militarized Rupture: Four Asian American Community-Based Archives," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23(1) (2020): 1–27.
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38 Michael Okamura, Focus Group at Uyehara Travel, Los Angeles, CA January 7, 2017.
39 Shelly Niimi, Focus Group at Uyehara Travel, Los Angeles, CA January 7, 2017.
40 Jeffrey Chop, Focus Group at Uyehara Travel, Los Angeles, CA January 7, 2017.
41 Kristen Hayashi, Focus Group at Uyehara Travel, Los Angeles, CA January 7, 2017.
42 Ibid.
43 Angela Risi, Focus Group at Lambda Archives, San Diego, CA, February 6, 2017.
44 Saidiya Hartman, Interviews, *ArtForum* (July 14, 2020), https://www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579?fbclid=IwAR2IGYVm6tQWu25vD_sXMzCoD1gxN1YILPmbU2KM4KZf4I3RH4zIXNrC4oc.
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Chapter 3

From representation to activation

Activating corollary records

Speaking at a July 2020 community-wide open Zoom meeting, SAADA Executive Director, Samip Mallick said, "As an organization, even though we are thinking about and engaging with the past, our work has really always been about the present, the now."[1] The meeting was called by Mallick in the midst of three intertwined crises: a global pandemic that had disproportionately devastated Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities; the ongoing state-sanctioned murder of Black Americans brought to the fore by the murder of George Floyd; and inept, malfeasant, white supremacist national leadership in the White House. "We have some good news to share in the midst of this challenging time," Mallick's invitation promised.

We all needed that good news, it seemed, after being stuck at home for 4 months. The meeting drew 101 participants, mostly first and second generation South Asian Americans, spread across the country. Mallick invited us to turn our cameras on so we could see each other, creating a sense of togetherness despite physical isolation. Old friends I have met volunteering for SAADA over the years and I private messaged each other: "Good to see your face!" and "Look at the community we've created!" The mood was celebratory, despite our external circumstances.

The July 2020 meeting was an opportunity to celebrate the organization's twelfth birthday, to announce a new $300,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that would help support the organization for the next 2 years, and to launch a fundraising campaign with supporters. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate the archives' value by drawing on corollary moments from the community's past to make sense of the seemingly senseless and increasingly overwhelming present. At that moment, that meant activating records in SAADA's collections to inspire action around three major events: the COVID-19 epidemic, the movement for Black lives, and the upcoming 2020 election.

This chapter will show how SAADA is drawing on corollary records from corollary moments to catalyze political consciousness and action in the now. Like the members of minoritized communities coalescing around the community archives described in the previous chapter, the South Asian American communities coalescing around SAADA forge a cyclical view of time in which historic oppression can

DOI: 10.4324/9781003001355-4

reoccur at any moment, challenging the dominant white racial progress narrative. In activating records for current movements against oppression, SAADA is simultaneously building on and moving past its initial recuperative and representational collecting efforts, engaging in the liberatory activation of records.

First, this chapter will describe how SAADA is activating records in the current moment, using the July 2020 community-wide meeting as a lens for examining three new organizational initiatives. The chapter will then discuss these initiatives in light of my prior work on symbolic annihilation and representational belonging, arguing both that decisions about archival appraisal have great consequences and that symbolic and actual annihilation are intimately linked. Yet, it will also argue that more robust and accurate representation of minoritized communities is a limited (and limiting) end goal for community archives, however important. Community archives must aim for more than representation, leveraging the minoritized histories they have painstakingly recuperated for liberatory ends. Through strategic outreach with activists, artists, and other community members, archivists can ensure the records in their care are *activated* to stop oppression in the present. Ultimately, the chapter argues that community archives must pair liberatory appraisal with liberatory activation in order to resist the white temporal imaginary. By drawing on the previous chapters' explorations of temporalities, cyclical oppressions, and corollary moments, this chapter will demonstrate how one community archives' outreach initiatives aim to interrupt white time by activating corollary records to stop cyclical oppression in the now.

Although this chapter draws on my experiences as a co-founder and volunteer for SAADA, I have not directly worked on the three main projects discussed herein, other than digitizing some of the collections from which the projects draw and providing some very general feedback. That said, I am in constant conversation with SAADA's Executive Director Samip Mallick and I often provide informal advice on project ideas and implementation. As such, I cannot claim to stand entirely apart from the work addressed in this chapter. I make no assertions of being an outside researcher (though I am a white outsider to the South Asian American community), but rather am an integral component of the phenomena my work describes, in a manner consistent with participant observation as a research method. I also cannot claim ownership or take credit for most of the archival labor described herein, and shift from using "we" to "they" pronouns in discussing the work of SAADA staff when appropriate.

Embarking on the present

"There is little doubt we are living through a historic moment," reads the opening text of SAADA's participatory initiative to document South Asian American experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] Launched in April 2020, the project, *Letters from 6' Away*, asks South Asian Americans to write a letter to their future selves about their experiences with the pandemic. With the creator's permission, the letters are included in the archives and mailed to the creator a year after submission, "in hopefully better days ahead." "While we are all eager to move past the difficulties of this time, there are also personal memories, lessons, and revelations that we will want to hold on to,"

the organization's project description explains.[3] To that end, SAADA offers a series of online prompts to get participants to start writing:

- During this period, my time is being spent…
- This pandemic made me realize…
- One thing that really surprised me about this experience is…
- Some moments I want to remember a year from now are…
- I can't wait to stop being socially distant from…
- I most look forward to…[4]

Participants reply to these prompts online, upload a photograph of themselves, designate degrees of privacy or publicity from a continuum of options provided, and submit a mailing address in which they would like their letters to be sent back to themselves in a year's time. There is also a space to honor a loved one who has passed during the crisis.

SAADA staff named the project *Letters from 6' Away* in reference to the distance public health experts recommend we maintain to slow the spread of the virus. The letters are exchanged at a metaphoric social distance, revealing that participants are not just writing to themselves, but to each other, as letters are shared on SAADA's social media pages and within the archives (with the consent of their creators), creating a sense of intimacy and community despite the spatial gap. We can be simultaneously together and apart as a community, the title conveys.

The project is not SAADA's first effort to catalyze the creation of short records from community members. In 2013, SAADA launched the *First Days* Project, a website where immigrants are encouraged to generate, upload, and share short textual, audio, or video records about their first days in the United States.[5] Originally focused on immigrants from South Asia, the project expanded its reach to include immigrants to the United States from anywhere in the world due to popular demand. At the time of writing, 535 stories are shared on the *First Days Project* website. Following the success of the *First Days Project*, SAADA launched the participatory *Road Trips* project to generate and share brief records about "the long and diverse history of South Asian travelling across the country," as a way to reclaim an American tradition in the face of racist violence.[6] In a 2014 *Archives and Manuscripts* article about the *First Days* project, Mallick and I called these stories "digital participatory microhistories," which we defined as "any programmatic activity that uses Internet-based technologies to encourage community members to directly create short records for inclusion in an archives."[7] Archival theorists restricted to the dominant Western tradition (including one of the reviewers of our 2014 *Archives and Manuscripts* article), deem such projects "unarchival" because they catalyze the generation of new records created for the explicit purpose of being archived, rather than collect pre-existing records that were created as the "neutral by-product" of administrative activity, with no foresight of inclusion in an archives, according to the dominant Western conception of "record." Mallick and I argue that such distinctions are meaningless for many communities and indeed, that we are ethically compelled to generate new records in the face of racist erasures and silences in pre-existing records. I would apply the same logic to the *Letters from 6' Away* project.

Letters from 6' Away is also not unique in terms of archival efforts to collect materials documenting historic events as they happen. Almost every major archival institution has announced efforts to contemporaneously collect records document the Trump election, ensuing protests, the COVID-19 crisis, and the 2020 Uprising for Black lives. At their worst, these efforts can be extractive and irresponsible, turning archivists into vultures circling the dead with little regard for consent, privacy, and the protection of vulnerable subjects, often under the guise of "neutrality."[8] At their best, these projects can be deeply engaged with communities of struggle, ethically committed to protecting vulnerable subjects, and framed inherently as politically motivated by and aligned with liberation struggles, as is the case of The Documenting the *Now* project, which seeks to ethically collect social media records related to Black activism.[9] *Letters from 6' Away* strives for this kind of ethical commitment by offering records' creators multiple levels of consent and privacy, thereby creating differential levels of access to the public.

At the time of writing in August 2020, 147 people had already submitted letters, with excerpts of several of them shared publicly on SAADA's social media accounts. The submissions are deeply personal and self-reflexive, yet collectively offer a window into a wider community ethos of grief, feelings of isolation, and the search for solace. Many of the letters address differing experiences of time during the pandemic. One participant, quoted on SAADA's public Facebook page, wrote, "One thing that really surprised me about this experience has been how deeply hard and transitory it's been, how days feel like they both move fast and slow. How everything feels like there's a residue of grief."[10] Another wrote,

> I'm most looking forward to... riding the subway alongside strangers, being able to see their faces and imagine again, their lives – and maybe this time really trying to see and understand. To becoming more authentically connected to others – to know how precious this truly is and how it can be taken away within a moment- how sacred our interactions are with one another, each one so precious, so sweet...[11]

Another participant, marking the death of her mother from the virus, wrote,

> We are looking for the moments of grace though the 13 days of zoom prayers that will be a lasting memorial to her love, the ability to slow down and grieve without the disturbances of 'normal life', the peace in knowing she is no longer in pain or suffering.[12]

It is clear from the submissions that the pandemic has disturbed many community members' routines and senses of time: how we experience time moving "both fast and slow" during isolation; how sudden the loss has seemed, but also how enduring; how grief provides a moment to stop the usual expectations of time, yet the temporal interruption of a mourning period is ultimately insufficient to mark a life now gone.

For some participants, the present moment inspired a greater connection to the community's histories and cultures. One wrote:

> This pandemic has made me realize… that I would like to become more involved than I already am in the collaborative making of a nonviolent, nurturing, responsive culture; that I want to learn my family's language, Punjabi, not as an insular nod to 'keeping traditional values alive' in my family (mostly to keep the patriarchs smiling), but for the pleasure of embarking into the present with a feeling of honor, responsibility, magnanimity, embrace.[13]

This notion of "embarking into the present" graced with knowledge from the past encapsulates the spirit of the *Letters from 6' Away* project, and echoes the *temporalities of urgency* expressed by focus group participants at other community archives described in the previous chapter. Memories, traditions, evidence of the past, records—they are for use in the now, as a way to confront the challenges of today.

In these letters, historic traumas surface and resurface as South Asian Americans learn to cope with the new reality. For example, in her public entry to the project, Samira Ghosh of Texas writes:

> I would remember the first news that we need to store food. My first instinct was to buy rice and salt at Gandhi Bazar [sic]. It was a reaction to a historic trauma that my community went through. Bengal had a big man-made famine post WW-2 and rice and salt were in scarcity. I had heard stories of what my family went through. I was surprised that this deep seated insecurity had surfaced.

The Bengal Famine of 1943 emerges as a powerful inter-generational memory, being relived even though the writer herself had not directly experienced it. She continues that getting groceries delivered in the early days of quarantine "felt like Christmas morning." For some participants, the pandemic surfaced deeply ingrained traumas and enacted circular temporalities as if history was repeating itself, oceans and decades away, in a vastly different context.

When the *Letters from 6' Away* project invokes the future, it does so with a very specific timeframe in mind; the submitted letters to self will be mailed back to creators one year from submission. That yearlong futurity anchors the project, setting an important temporal boundary; the letters aren't just for posterity (though they will be preserved in the archives with the creators' permission), they are for sharing now via SAADA's website and social media channels, and for the *very foreseeable* future. We do not know now what will happen in the distant future, this yearlong boundary seems to assert, but maybe we can all collectively envision just a year from now. The project moves around and across a repetition of time, asking participants to reflect on the now for a very soon if uncertain future, when it will then ask participants to look back toward a very recent past. In so doing, it both reflects and produces a cyclical temporality; the past is retrievable, the immediate future is conceivable. For those experiencing the depths of grief, loss, or isolation, this temporality creates an anticipatory moment, something small to look forward to, a future message from one's past self. As such, it is a small assurance in the present: the future will come, you will be here a year from now, your current experiences will have meaning to you then, even as you struggle to search for meaning

now. As we maintain a distance of 6 feet in space, the letters are 365 days away into the future (if you are writing in the present) or 365 days away into the past (if you are reading them in the future), a safe distance, but not an immeasurable one. The temporal effect is almost dizzying in its cyclicality.

The letters are created to be read at a non-corollary moment in the near future. It is the hope that, in a year's time, when the pandemic has presumably subsided (or at least its demands on us are presumably different), that activating these records by reading them will reveal some new insight into what will then be *that* present moment.

Speaking about the *Letters from 6' Away* project at the July 2020 community meeting, Mallick said:

> It's really been a difficult period… Like many of you in the initial days and weeks after the quarantine self-isolation pandemic period started, I was kind of stuck about what to do. I did not really know how as an organization we should respond to the moment. I certainly didn't know what to do personally, and I still honestly don't know what to do personally, but as an organization I was not sure how we should move forward. But then I realized what an incredible responsibility we have as a community archives to ensure that our community's voices are being reflected in what is truly a historic moment that we are all living through right now.[14]

In Mallick's remarks, we see the ability to move out of a sense of being stuck, toward fulfilling a social obligation in the present. We also see a level of honesty, humility, humanity, and self-reflection that rarely accompanies contemporaneous collecting efforts at mainstream repositories affiliated with universities or government agencies. "I don't have the answers, I'm trying to work through it and make meaning of it just like you are," Mallick seemed to communicate, "Let's figure it out together." This sense of shared authority is a hallmark of successful community archives, I argue elsewhere.[15]

The *Letters from 6' Away project* certainly has a representational aspect, with an explicit aim to "ensure our community's experiences of this moment are preserved," so that voices from people of color, in this case South Asian American voices, are not missing from the historic record. Yet representation alone, however important, is not the only end goal.[16] The project builds on that sense of more robust representation to move the community together through time. The project builds community by providing a platform for letters to be shared with each other. But more importantly, it underscores the affective importance of the creation of records to participants—those who write letters to themselves feel validated, heard, documented in the historic record, even if they choose not to share their letters with others. In a year's time, the project transforms records creators into records users as participants read their own letters from the not-so-distant past. It also ensures the records will be activated by these users in the near future. In so doing, it inaugurates a cyclical temporality, catalyzing movement back and forth along a pendulum swinging back and forth between now, a year ago, a year from now.

"Let's be on the right side of history"

After inviting attendees of the July 2020 community meeting to participate in the *Letters from 6' Away* project, Mallick then pivoted to the other crisis on everyone's minds: the proliferation of and impunity for state-sponsored violence against Black people. South Asian Americans have a complicated history with the American racial hierarchy, as many records in SAADA attest; some early immigrants from India aligned themselves with whiteness to varying degrees of success, while others passed as Black. For example, the landmark 1923 US Supreme Court case that overturned South Asian American citizenship based on racial grounds rested on the plaintiff Bhagat Singh Thind's ultimately unsuccessful claim to whiteness via "Aryan" and upper caste heritage.[17] By contrast, an untold number of Bengali immigrants lived within Black communities in Harlem and New Orleans as early as the early 1900s, as Vivek Bald has traced, and many South Asian immigrants saw and enacted deep affinities between anti-colonial struggles in South Asia and Black liberation movements in the United States.[18] The 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act that enabled South Asians to immigrate to the United States in larger numbers would not have been possible without the Civil Rights movement. South Asian Americans are targeted for racism, hate crimes, and state surveillance, particularly in the wake of 9/11, yet many, particularly those with caste and class privilege, continue to promote white supremacist policies and values, as evidenced by the platforms of several prominent conservative South Asian American politicians like Nikki Haley and Bobby Jindal.[19] Anti-black racism remains an ongoing problem within the community, despite the efforts of many progressive and radical South Asian American activists.

For Mallick, the July 2020 meeting was an opportunity to further position SAADA as an organization committed to justice for Black people. Acknowledging complex histories, he drew connections between the ongoing Movement for Black lives and corollary moments in history in which South Asian Americans were involved in activism for Black liberation. Yet, he also directly confronted anti-Black racism within the community and did not gloss over its history of aspirational (mis)alignment with white supremacy. "In response to the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and too many others, we are sharing stories from our community's past that help engage our community today in the struggle against anti-Black racism," Mallick said. He then recounted the story of H.G. Mudgal, an Indian immigrant to Harlem in the 1920s, who became the editor of Marcus Garvey's newspaper *Negro World* and an outspoken activist for Black independence, including Garvey's Back-to-Africa movement. Mallick then invited participants to learn more about H.G. Mudgal by reading a story about him in SAADA's online magazine *Tides*.[20] The story is full of images of and links to records in SAADA and other repositories, inviting readers to follow archival trails.

> H.G. Mudgal's story is a reminder both of the historical possibilities and duties for South Asians to engage in solidarity with Black communities, but moreover, the urgency *now* for us to engage in those solidarities and to address anti-Blackness within our own communities,

he said. Mallick continued, "to be able to share these stories from the past, to be able to engage with contemporary discourse and dialogue and movements has been really rewarding and enriching for us an organization and I hope they help to move our community as well."[21]

Mallick's comments reflect a temporality of urgency, in which records from the past are invoked to inspire contemporary political action. In this way, the 1920s are set up as a corollary moment to the 2020s, and records documenting H.G. Mudgal from the 1920s are set up as corollary records to those being created by South Asian American activists fighting anti-Black racism now. By catalyzing corollary records from corollary moments, Mallick showed precedent for South Asian American solidarity with Black Americans, evoking "historical possibilities," as he put it, that align the community with the contemporary Movement for Black lives. Following the July 2020 meeting, Mallick participated in two additional online events in support of South Asian and Black solidarity: an August 4, 2020 talk, "Your Dream is Our Dream: From H.G. Mudgal to South Asians for Black Lives," hosted by the University of British Columbia and an August 13, 2020 workshop entitled "K(no)w History, K(no)w Self: South Asians as Co-Conspirators in Black Liberation" hosted by the Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA) and South Asians for Black Lives. In these events, SAADA is clearly positioning itself as a South Asian American memory organization forging historic and contemporary solidarities with Black people against white supremacy.

The H.G. Mudgal story is one of many stories about South Asian American affinity and solidarity with Black liberation struggles that SAADA has highlighted in its online magazine *Tides* and on its Facebook and Twitter accounts over the years. A five-part series in *Tides* called "The Problem," launched in February 2020 is dedicated to exploring questions of race and caste in light of the 1923 Bhagat Singh Thind US Supreme Court case.[22] "Whose struggles are ours?" the third installment of that series asks, answering the question a few paragraphs down: "As the Thind decision teaches us, the strategy of claiming whiteness, or using one's religion, caste, gender, or wealth to appeal for acceptance, is ultimately a losing one."[23] The third installment ends:

> And, like H.G. Mudgal, South Asians worldwide have been drawing inspiration from, and collaborating with Black Americans' fight for freedom and justice for centuries. In 1873, Jotirao Phule, a social reformer in Maharashtra, India began his essay Gulamgiri (Slavery), with a dedication to American abolitionists. And in 1971, a group called the "Dalit Panthers" in India declared in their manifesto: "From the Black Panthers, Black Power was established. We claim a close relationship with this struggle."[24]

This series adds to many *Tides* articles that draw from and provide links to records in SAADA that evidence historic alignments between South Asians and African Americans, including several that explicitly discuss the ongoing legacy of such alignments in the current political moment. For example, a February 2019

article, "The Other Kamala," recounts the story of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a traveler to the United States from India who, in 1941, refused to adhere to the rules of racial segregation on a train in the American South, describing herself as "colored" rather than white. In an attempt to tie Chattopadhyay's anti-racist refusal to the then-current Presidential bid of Kamala Harris, the author asks if it is possible for the Presidential contender Kamala to follow in the footsteps of the traveler Kamala in refusing to adhere to the "new Jim Crow" of mass incarceration, in reference to Harris's troubled past as Attorney General of California, the state with the largest incarcerated population in the United States.[25] Here, a namesake is used to invoke a corollary moment in history to hold a contemporary politician to task. Other *Tides* articles address the correspondence between Indian intellectual and activist B.R. Ambedkar and W.E. B. Du Bois, and the affinity between Gandhi and Martin Luther King in creating strategies for nonviolent struggle.[26] All of these articles draw on and direct readers to records in SAADA related to these moments in time, inviting readers to take their own journeys as users of archives.

Through its social media pages, SAADA also highlighted contemporary artwork that draws on archival records and historical knowledge for ongoing activism for Black liberation. In June 2020, for example, the organization highlighted a series of drawings by Shebani Rao, a contemporary illustrator whose prior work has used records in SAADA to depict South Asian American historical figures, including a comic book about Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.[27] Rao's drawings, shared on the SAADA site, portray a variety of older South Asian American immigrants, "aunties and uncles," as younger South Asian Americans might characterize them, in a range of clothing styles and skin colors, talking about the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. Rao's drawings, these aunties and uncles, place the murders of Black people by the police within the context of a long history of violence against Black communities, and describe ongoing protests against this violence.

> The mainstream news describes these protests as riots. Remember, even our struggle against the British—which Black activists in America supported—was also described as riots! Let's be on the right side of history and support our Black community as they fight for freedom and safety!

The drawings end with a call to "Donate to end state violence against Black people TODAY!" and a list of websites of Black-led activist organizations and bail funds where such donations can be made.[28] The work is intended for younger generations of South Asian Americans to pick whichever auntie or uncle image best resonates with them and to share it with their parents' generation (Figure 3.1).

Rao's posters invoke a corollary moment—Indian independence from colonial rule—to garner South Asian American support for the contemporary movement for Black lives. By showing how the word "riot" was weaponized against South Asians in a just struggle against British rule, Rao asks South Asian Americans to question the use of the term to describe protests against impunity for the murders

Figure 3.1 "Desi Aunty for Black Lives" by Shebani Rao. Image appears courtesy of Shebani Rao.

of Black Americans. In so doing, Rao forges a solidarity across space, time, and community, creating a corollary moment between Black and South Asian communities. The posters also give language to younger South Asian Americans attempting to have conversations about anti-Black racism with their own family members. As such, they compel action.

Rao's graphics, taken together with Mallick's remarks at the July 2020 zoom meeting, and years of *Tides* articles and recent social media posts, forge a cyclical temporality similar to that seen at the other community archives sites described in the previous chapter. These cyclical temporalities dispense with the racial progress narratives of white time; instead of insisting that "it gets better" for minoritized communities, these efforts show how oppressive histories repeat, how "historical possibilities" (to use Mallick's words) can be invoked to forge affinities and solidarities in the present, how a precedent of anti-racist activism can inspire action for Black lives in the now. In this work, archives become urgently relevant and crucially contemporary.

At the same time, even as SAADA's work holds out trajectories of co-liberation as precedent, it also couples historical acts of solidarity with a confrontation of the trajectories of anti-Black racism with South Asian American communities, past and present. To gloss over those (mis)alignments with white supremacy would be historically inaccurate, as several *Tides* articles remind us.

Throughout these archival activations, time is cyclical, the oppression keeps happening, and the affinities are imperative. Representation matters; it matters that an Indian immigrant worked as an editor and advocate for Marcus Garvey in the 1920s, it matters that an Indian traveler refused to be categorized as white in the 1940s American South, it matters that Dalit activists were inspired by the Black Panthers in the 1970s. Yet the current moment demands more from the archives than simply documenting these stories of solidarity in the hope that some future users might find them. SAADA catalyzes these records into action to forge corollary moments across cycles of time and to create a temporality of urgency for the communities it serves and represents.

"How easily they can be taken away"

Mallick's final announcement at the July 2020 meeting also conveyed the urgency of the past by forging yet another corollary moment with the present. Looking ahead to the November 2020 US Presidential election, Mallick discussed a 2-minute video SAADA produced in May 2020 featuring Rani Bagai, whose grandparents, Vaishno Das and Kala Bagai, were among the first immigrants from India to the United States, arriving in 1915.

Against a backdrop of sepia-toned photographs, newspapers clippings, and correspondence from the Vaishno Das and Kala Bagai collection in SAADA, Rani Bagai's voice asks: "Why does your vote matter? Well, allow me to tell you a story…"[29] She then tells of how her grandfather, Vaishno Das Bagai, opened up a prosperous import-export business in San Francisco, became active in an international political movement to overthrow the British raj in India, and became a US

citizen, despite significant racist discrimination.[30] A 1923 US Supreme Court decision stripped South Asian Americans of their citizenship based on racial grounds, rendering Vaishno Das Bagai stateless. Refusing to return to being a British subject, Vaishno Das Bagai killed himself in protest in 1928. In the short video, Rani Bagai reads from her grandfather's published suicide note, saying:

> I came to America thinking, dreaming, and hoping to make this land my home. I established myself and tried to give my children the best American education, but they now say I am no longer an American citizen. Now, what am I? What have I made of myself and my children? We cannot exercise our rights. Is life worth living in a gilded cage?[31]

Rani Bagai then notes that it would be more than two decades later until citizenship rights were restored for South Asian immigrants, like her surviving grandmother and father. Over a photographic backdrop of a recent South Asian immigrant's citizenship ceremony, Rani Bagai continues,

> This is why voting matters. I hope my family's story is a reminder of what we have endured to get the rights we have now, how easily they can be taken away, and how hard it is to win them back.

The visuals switch back to a photograph of her grandfather, as she says, "If you haven't yet, please register to vote right now. And please, please vote in November." The film ends with the tagline "Your vote, our future," and SAADA's logo.[32]

The video, posted on SAADA's Facebook page and Instagram and Twitter accounts, was viewed more than 66,000 times by August 2020 and was even re-posted on Kamala Harris's Instagram page (before her Vice-Presidential nomination). Included in the posts was a link to vote.org where eligible viewers can register to vote. In the community Zoom meeting, Mallick reiterated Rani Bagai's words in saying,

> Her family story is a reminder to all of us how difficult it was for us to get the rights that we have today, how easily they can be taken away, and how hard it is to win them back.

He continued,

> I would encourage you to watch the video and share it with others, but most of all, if you haven't done so yet, please register to vote and vote in this and all elections going forward. Voting is one important way for our community's voice to be heard.

In this brief video Rani Bagai articulated a cyclical temporality, later echoed by Mallick at the community meeting, that refuses the logic of white racial progress narratives. Progress is not given, the granting of an ever-increasing number of rights is not inevitable. Rather, these messages communicate: South Asian Americans did

not always have these rights, our ancestors fought for them, they could be rescinded, we might have to fight for them again. Oppressive histories repeat themselves; the threat of this repetition looms large. The video is haunted by Trump's election, its attendant explicit white supremacy, and the impending possibility of his reelection. In just 2 minutes, this video counters white temporalities that assume the inevitability and desirability of a just, post-racial future. Instead, we see a community weathering repeated attacks throughout history and using traces of the past to ward off the next attack in the present, drawing on records from corollary moments, in this case the 1923 dismantling of citizenship rights, to catalyze voter registration in 2020. There is a temporal urgency to the past here.

It is important to note that this video is produced and sponsored by SAADA and not by an external entity or user. Community archives do not have the same pretense of neutrality to which many university or government repositories claim adherence. Such adherence is a guise for an oppressive status quo rooted in whiteness, as Mario H. Ramirez has traced.[33] Instead, many community archives see themselves as active participants in their community's political struggles. Although the legalities of non-profit status in the United States prohibit organizations like SAADA from explicitly campaigning for or against a specific political candidate, the politics of this message are clear: vote to reinstate the community's rights and those of other minoritized communities in November election after 4 years of those rights being under threat. Although encouraging voter participation is not the most radical of messages—voting is, after all, only one small way to enact change from within a system—SAADA does not shy away from activating historic records for political change in the now.

The mattering of representation

In the three examples I just described, SAADA is urgently catalyzing the creation and use of records to build political consciousness and action. The action may be affective, in the case of *Letters from 6' Away*, or it may be political, in the case of supporting the Movement for Black Lives and encouraging South Asian Americans to register to vote. These examples mark an important shift for the organization, a movement from collecting records for recuperative and representational purposes, what I would call a form of liberatory appraisal, toward using and encouraging others to use those records against oppression in what I call liberatory activation.

In the initial years of working with SAADA, Mallick, other volunteers, and I were stunned with the amount of materials we found that dated back before 1965, when US immigration law changed to enable greater numbers of South Asians into the United States. Back in 2008 when we founded SAADA, we had read about California's early Punjabi–Mexican communities in Karen Leonard's work, and heard rumors about a few anti-colonial activists along the West Coast of the United States and Canada from the turn of the twentieth century, but we had no idea the wealth of records we would find once we really started to look.[34] We feverishly collected as many pre-1965 records as we could find, thrilled to fill in some of the gaps and silences we had found when we looked for South Asian American stories in

mainstream repositories like the US National Archives and Records Administration and dozens of university archives.

Our initial aims were *recuperative* in the sense that we were trying to recuperate lost histories, pulling them back from oblivion into the community's consciousness.[35] Our work was also *representational* in the sense that we were trying to increase the amount and types of representations of South Asians in US stories about the past. Recuperative and representational collecting kept us busy for nearly a decade, and guided by a very broad appraisal policy, we discovered (and digitized) more than we had ever anticipated about South Asian American history.

Building on Duff and Harris's naming of "liberatory description," I characterize these initial recuperative and representational collecting impulses as forms of liberatory appraisal.[36] Appraisal is the process by which archivists assign evidentiary value to collections of materials, resulting in important decisions about what is "archival," what falls within organizational scope, what gets collected, what gets excluded, and ultimately, what gets destroyed. Appraisal theory has preoccupied archival studies for a century, resulting in a host of theories, strategies, and tactics archivists employ to make appraisal decisions, including assigning notions of primary and secondary value, functional analyses, and documentation strategy. Recently, I have proposed feminist standpoint appraisal as a type of liberatory appraisal that acknowledges the positionality of the appraiser and seeks to center the needs of those most disempowered due to the interlocking oppressions of white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy.[37] In placing value in materials created by minoritized communities, in appraising them as worthy of retention and preservation, and in thinking about the affective, material, and political consequences of such decisions on the communities represented in such records, archivists engaged in representational and recuperative collecting can be said to engage in liberatory appraisal.

Still, for SAADA's staff and communities, merely representing brown people in US history has never been enough. For years, Mallick and community members have discussed how, if the archives only collected the records of the most prominent South Asian Americans, the collection would replicate the same forms of erasure it sought to combat. What good would a South Asian American archives be if it only validated the experiences of straight cis upper caste men? Keenly aware of these archival silences, Mallick consciously sought out collections created by South Asian American people and organizations further minoritized by gender, caste, sexuality, region, religion, ability, and class. This is no easy feat; due to the politics of who creates and preserves records in the first place, many of these communities have left behind little if any material traces. Dalit writer Dhanya Addanki calls this a "double-edged sword of not allowing folks to record history and blaming folks that there is no 'proof' of their lived experiences."[38] It is the archival logic of white supremacy that claims that disempowered people do not create records, archivists cannot collect records that do not exist, therefore archivists cannot collect records created by disempowered people.

Over the years, it became increasingly clear that, for SAADA's collection to be inclusive of those most minoritized within South Asian American communities, we would have to think outside of the box of dominant Western archival appraisal, catalyzing the

creation of new records rather than searching for pre-existing records to digitize alone. In 2019, with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, SAADA launched the Archival Creators Fellowship Program, which partnered with three Fellows to create archival collections that reflect the histories and perspectives of some of the most marginalized groups within the South Asian American community: Dalit women; Indo-Guyanese immigrants; and queer and trans people.[39] Each of these three collections has a significant oral history and storytelling component that depart from dominant archival practices; for example, they allow for participants to remain anonymous if they so choose, given the real threat of violence Dalit, trans, queer, and gender non-conforming community members face. The project reveals how, in the absence of robust preexisting documentation, recuperation alone is not enough. While it is crucial to catalyze the generation of new records that fill in gaps, in order to truly center minoritized communities, archives must respect silences, resist surveillance, and honor consent. This will mean changing commonly accepted practices and policies.

Our initial twin impulses of recuperation and representation were motivated by what I would come to describe as countering the "symbolic annihilation" of South Asian Americans with "representational belonging." Symbolic annihilation is a term that the research team I lead at UCLA Community Archives Lab I borrowed from feminist media studies scholars, who in the 1970s described the deeply negative emotional impact of not seeing one's community adequately and accurately represented in media.[40] We characterized symbolic annihilation in archives as the under-representation, mis-representation, and/or absence of minoritized communities in the historic record, together with attendant feelings of exclusion and erasure.[41] By contrast, a series of interviews my research team and I did with South Asian American users of SAADA uncovered the deeply positive emotional impact of seeing robust and accurate self-representation in community archives like SAADA, a phenomenon we described as "representational belonging."[42] We further delineated three aspects of representational belonging: ontological impact (assertions that *I am here*), epistemological impact (assertions that *we were here*), and social impact (assertions that *we belong here*).[43] By finding, digitizing, and providing access to as many records documenting the early history of South Asian Americans as we could, we were countering the community's symbolic annihilation in history with a powerful assertion of existence and belonging.

Clearly, experiences of seeing yourself and your community in history after being excluded or misrepresented due to racism and/or hetero-patriarchy are emotionally powerful. Nearly every interview and focus group I have conducted with the volunteers, staff, users of, and donors to minoritized community-based archives over the past 5 years confirm the affective impact of robust representation after repeated and extended experiences of symbolic annihilation in mainstream archives. This affective impact, archives provoking the feeling of self-recognition in minoritized communities, can be an important emotional element of liberation. It is joyous to see yourself robustly represented after feeling symbolically annihilated. This joy is inherently political in a system designed to oppress.

It is also gravely important for people who inhabit dominant identities to engage with representations of and from minoritized communities. Robust archival

representation of minoritized communities can change dominant narratives, sometimes with serious consequences. Symbolic and actual annihilation are intimately related. Symbolic annihilation both precedes and succeeds actual annihilation such that individuals and communities are rendered expendable, invisible, or nonexistent before they are subject to violence, particularly state-sanctioned violence. And then, after violence, such murderous acts are often rendered invisible or expunged from the record, magnifying and mimicking the violence itself. Every dehumanizing misrepresentation in archives that says "you are not quite human" and every archival absence that says "you are not important enough to collect" adds up to create the conditions that enable mass murder and/or genocide to occur. After such violence happens, every dehumanizing misrepresentation of that violence in archives that says "you deserved it anyway" and every archival absence of that violence says "your death is not important enough to note" also adds up to the conditions that justify mass murder and/or genocide, grant impunity for it, and enable it to occur again, setting us all up for the fallout next time.

Archivists' hands are never clean in this repetition of violence, despite the self-serving pleas for neutrality. Tonia Sutherland has termed this abdication of responsibility "archival amnesty" and, as Sutherland convincingly argues, it has long been time for archivists to stop letting themselves off the hook.[44]

Given this link between symbolic and actual annihilation, any discussion of liberatory archives must assert the importance of robust representation and recuperative collecting. Liberatory appraisal strategies such as these seek to center oppressed positionalities by assigning archival value based on the needs of oppressed communities; these needs may include valuing records for evidentiary purposes as in the case of potential legal redress, or for affective purposes, in the case of countering symbolic annihilation with representational belonging. It matters if you can see *yourself* represented in history. It matters if others can see *you* represented in history. But still, representation is not the only or ultimate goal of liberatory memory work. As Roopika Risam writes, "mere addition is not enough."[45]

The limits of representation

Although representation is crucial, a few notes of caution are due. Too often recuperative collecting projects fall into a trap of respectability that is ultimately counter to the aims of liberation. A politics of respectability insists on collecting records that conform to dominant expectations about what a minoritized community should be.[46] This is true of many university-led projects that seek to recuperate the history of minoritized communities by documenting their prominent "firsts"—the first politician from a given community, the first business leader, the first actor. Filling archives with celebratory success stories from prominent leaders can reinforce harmful stereotypes that blame oppressed people for their own oppression; many Asian American community archives, for example, can undergird "model minority" myths that thinly veil anti-Black racism.[47] Such collections, whether they are in dominant or community-led archives, are about inclusion within oppressive structures rather than about liberation from them. They pander to dominant groups instead of resist domination.

Relatedly, community archives are also capable of symbolically annihilating those whose identities remain on the margins of the given community around which they coalesce. Elspeth Brown, for example, has written compelling about the ways in which LGBTQ2+ community archives can uphold and replicate narratives of whiteness, settler colonialism, and cis-normativity that symbolically annihilate trans and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).[48] Brown's work is a powerful reminder that there is nothing inherently liberatory about the "community" aspect of "community archives."

Furthermore, as many trans activists have noted, the heightened visibility brought about by increased representation can further expose vulnerable communities to violence and other forms of oppression. As Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton write,

> when produced within the cosmology of racial capitalism, the promise of 'positive representation' ultimately gives little support or protection to many, if not most, trans and gender non-conforming people, particularly those who are low-income and/or of color—the very people whose lives and labor constitute the ground for figuration of this moment of visibility.[49]

And yet, at the same time, the same authors assert, "immense transformational and liberatory possibilities arise from what are otherwise sites of oppression or violent extraction… when individuals have agency in their representation."[50]

This paradox, simultaneously holding in tension representation and endangerment, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, speaks directly to cyclical temporalities, as minoritized communities respond to repeating cycles of oppression and flashes of liberation. The desire or need to be seen and heard changes over time in response to the larger political climate. Artist, activist, and trans historian Morgan Page writes,

> Rather than a linear narrative of progress, what we really seem to be dealing with are cycles of visibility over the past one and a half centuries that have had and continue to have direct, often negative, impacts upon the lived realities of trans peoples. Visibility, this supposed cure-all, might actually be poison.[51]

While such observations about the paradox of representation are made in the context of mass media representation, they hold true for archives as well. Visibility, one might ask, for whom? In this context, recuperative and representational collecting can be exploitative, extractive, and harmful, the result of oppressive appraisal practices, if downstream use is not considered.

Given this complexity, more representational collecting is not necessarily the result of liberatory appraisal, *but it can be*. Recuperative and representational collecting can be liberatory appraisal strategies if they are part of a larger liberatory project. Thus liberatory appraisal is the process of determining the value of records in regards to their potential activation for liberation struggles. Contrary to the past century of dominant Western appraisal theory, liberatory appraisal considers the

potential uses of records in making appraisal decisions, and further asks *whose uses* and *for what aims*. In this sense, liberatory appraisal is intimately tied to liberatory outreach, as it is only in the activation of records that their full liberatory potential can be realized. Its undergirding assumption is that archives can catalyze particular kinds of use (political, artistic, activist) by modeling that use in their own practices and by targeting outreach efforts to groups engaged in liberatory work.

My argument here echoes, but also complicates, an argument made by Jarrett Drake in a 2018 blog post in advance of the "Architecting Sustainable Futures" event organized by Bergis Jules and the staff of Shift Design. Questioning any easy notion of "community" in "community archives," Drake writes: "archivists must shift their paradigms away from the fictive notions of 'local' and 'community-based' towards a more radically precise and politically liberatory language."[52] Drake importantly pinpoints an aspirational shift from recuperative and representational archives to liberatory archives, but he does so in a way that, I think, simplifies the existing archival studies literature. Drake identifies the ways that "community" can be invoked as a euphemism to talk about minoritized people without a power analysis, that is, without addressing the oppressive systems that minoritize them in the first place. I have frequently witnessed the phenomena Drake describes, particularly regarding self-described "community-based collections" or, even worse, self-described "community archives" at university repositories, in which predominantly white-run institutions seek kudos for extracting materials from BIPOC communities in ways that reinforce and replicate white supremacy rather than interrogate and dismantle it. This is a common phenomenon that Drake is right to disrupt. Yet the archival studies literature of the past decade details the messy work of "community"; I know in the community archives course I teach, we spend the first week out of a 10-week quarter complicating easy notions of community by reading foundational articles by Elizabeth Crooke; Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith; and Andrew Flinn.[53] These articles all dispense with notions of "community" as warm and fuzzy places of belonging. Certainly, my own work shatters any simplistic conceptions of community as singular and altogether positive. As early as 2012, I wrote, "Power is central to this conversation [about community archives]… It is important to complicate any notions of community as singular, fixed, and uncontested."[54] Furthermore, a term I first used in 2014, "marginalized-identity-based community archives," is evidence of the ways archival studies scholars have been thinking through power from the inception of scholarship on community archives.[55] That same essay discusses "strategic essentialism" as a way to temporarily adapt identity categories in archives for discrete political gains. More recent work by the UCLA Community Archives Lab team explores how "community" and "archives" are mutually co-constituted, with anxieties about the shifting boundaries of identity central to the work of community archives.[56]

Yet, Drake rightfully pushes the field beyond recuperation and representation toward more incisive, specific political aims. He calls for a "seismic shift" to build liberatory archives that "require[s] that we as a group of 'community archive' practitioners and scholars begin to name the stakes of our work more candidly and clearly by transitioning to a language of precise political claims and a liberatory lens

to accompany it."[57] I amplify this call here. We do not need more collections that do the work of oppression in different colors and by other names; we need new kinds of collections and new kinds of organizations to care for them in order to enact liberatory practices.

From representation to liberatory activation

The influence of Verne Harris's work on liberatory memory work is clear in this discussion. Drake, together with Doria Johnson and myself, formed the US delegation for a dialogue series for international memory workers convened by the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Global Leadership Academy of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in 2016. Under the thoughtful direction of Harris, the dialogue series was guided by the "liberatory memory work" provocation issued by Chandre Gould and Harris in 2014.[58] This provocation insisted on a justice-oriented approach to archival work, one that fundamentally pays attention to power imbalances and is inextricably and unapologetically political. Harris's naming of liberation as an explicit goal of memory work gave us—myself, Drake, and countless other archivists of younger generations—the language to describe the importance and urgency of our work, and a way to make sense of our archival training in light of our pre-existing or coinciding commitments to political liberation struggles.

As part of the Mandela Foundation dialogue process, participants met for an intensive week in South Africa, followed by a week in Sri Lanka 6 months later. In between these trips, each participating country's delegation was funded to take a learning journey within their own country. As it so happened, the three members of what we called "Team USA" were from the Chicago area—Drake is from Gary, Indiana; Johnson was from the northern suburb of Evanston, and I am from the north side of Chicago—so we decided to return to our hometown. We spent two days touring local Black-run cultural institutions, community archives, and political organizations.[59] What we saw was astounding. There were Black-run cultural organizations that were serving as forces of gentrification, that were turning Black trauma into white aesthetic pleasure, that operated in direct opposition to the interests of the most vulnerable community members. There were Black-run archival organizations that were quietly and meticulously cataloging activist records on a very limited budget with no immediate outreach plans for their activation by community members. And, operating in an entirely different realm, Black-run political organizations tirelessly working against police violence and mass incarceration, and desperately searching for documentary and evidentiary systems to hold power accountable. It was as if archives and activist organizations were operating on two separate and parallel tracks—one focused on representation, the other focused on liberation.

This experience fundamentally shifted my thinking about community archives. Community archives, it has become increasingly clear to me, must leverage the recuperative and representational imperatives to *activate* corollary records across corollary moments in the present for liberation from oppressive systems. The work

of archives and the work of activism, the work of representation, and the work of liberation, cannot occur on separate but parallel tracks; they must be intertwined.

My use of the term "activation" of records builds on Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar's work. Writing in 2001, Ketelaar disputes dominant western notions of records being fixed and stable, instead arguing that records change over time, with each use. He writes,

> Every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interpretation by creator, user, and archivist is an activation of the record. The archive is an infinite activation of the record. Each activation leaves fingerprints which are attributes to the archive's infinite meaning.[60]

I agree with Ketelaar's assertion that records, and, by extension archives, accumulate layers of meaning over time through activation, to which I add the notion of *liberatory activation* here to describe those interventions in and uses of records that seek to dismantle systems of oppression and imagine and enact new possible worlds. As the trip to Chicago underscored for me, it is not enough for archival institutions to collect records documenting minoritized communities and/or activist movements with a vague notion of potential future use; these records must be activated by archivists and users for liberation struggles now. Archives, like many other cultural, social, and legal institutions, have a largely unrealized liberatory potential.

Realizing the imperative for liberatory archival activation changed how I did work for SAADA and how I discussed SAADA's work with others in the organization. After a decade of recuperative and representational work with SAADA, Mallick, myself, and other SAADA community members subtly began to shift focus from *collecting* more representative records to *activating* the significant body of records we have already collected toward liberatory ends. This is an ongoing journey. The three projects described at the beginning of this chapter are important milestones in this pivot, but there is still a long way to go. These initiatives signal an important pivot toward liberatory activation and foreshadow future work.

Liberation from the white temporal imaginary

As this chapter has asserted, the relationship between representation and liberation in community archives is not either/or; it can and should be both/and. Community archives can counter symbolic annihilation through liberatory appraisal that robustly represents and re-centers the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities without extraction or exploitation. Recuperative and representational collecting efforts can provide important material to counter symbolic annihilation with representational belonging and change dominant narratives of dehumanization that lead to the actual annihilation of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. But archives should not stop there. They can push for liberatory use and outreach, activating corollary records in their collections to stop cyclical oppression in the now.

Building archives around an acknowledgment of cyclical fluctuations in oppression and corresponding fluctuations in the desire, need, and ability to be recorded

and archived is a direct challenge to the white temporalities on which dominant Western archival theory is based. As described in Chapter 1, dominant Western archival theory fixes records in space and time, relying on a white temporal imaginary that posits time both as linear and progressive; the past precedes the present, the present presages the future, and social conditions get better over time. In contrast, SAADA, like other community archives, reflects a cyclical rather than linear temporality in which oppression repeats, records invoke corollary moments in the past and present, and records are collected in order to be activated to resist oppression in the now.

At the start of this chapter, I described three of SAADA's recent initiatives—*Letters from 6' Away*, work in support of the Movement for Black Lives, and efforts to encourage voter participation—as examples of a community archives moving beyond recuperative and representational collecting toward activating records for political use. This shift from liberatory appraisal to liberatory activation marks a new relationship to time for SAADA. First and most obviously, it reveals the maturation of the organization after more than a decade of collecting; now that we have a significant body of materials, we can encourage their use. But it does more than that, reshaping the role and responsibility of archives in cyclical, rather than linear time. In a cyclical temporality in which oppressive history repeats, the need, desire, and ability to be represented in archives fluctuates over time. This temporal construction resists the white temporal imaginary that asserts the linearity of time and the inevitability of progress. In catalyzing the activation of records to build corollary moments across time, space, and community, SAADA demonstrates that liberatory appraisal can propel the liberatory activation of records in the current moment. Liberatory activations will shift over time, as the political climate and needs of minoritized communities shift in response to repetitions of oppression. Refusing the stable logics of white temporality is a critical aspect of liberatory memory work.

As this chapter has argued, community archives must move beyond representation, however important, instead striving for liberation from oppressive structures (including the white temporal imaginary), rather than inclusion within them. The next chapter will speculate on what liberation looks like in archives and address how to simultaneously dismantle oppressive archival structures and build liberatory archival trajectories.

Notes

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 SAADA, "First Days Project," https://firstdays.saada.org/.
6 SAADA, "Road Trips Project," https://roadtrips.saada.org/.
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8 Eira Tansey, "No One Owes Their Trauma to Archivists, Or, the Commodification of Contemporaneous Collecting," (June 5, 2020), http://eiratansey.com/updates/.

9 The Documenting the Now project and the work of Bergis Jules exemplify the very best archival commitment to staying with the trouble of figuring out how to ethically document social movements as they happen. Doc Now, https://www.docnow.io/.
10 https://www.facebook.com/saadaorg/
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Samip Mallick, "An Update on SAADA's Future," July 9, 2020, public meeting via Zoom.
15 For more on shared authority, read: Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). On shared authority in archives, see: Isto Huvila, "Participatory Archive: Towards Decentralized Curation, Radical User Orientation, and Broader Contextualization of Records Management," *Archival Science* 8 (2008): 15–36; and Michelle Caswell, "Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Human Rights Archives: Lessons from Community-Based Archives," *Archival Science* 14(3–4) (2014): 307–322.
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Chapter 4

Imagining liberatory memory work[1]

Drawing on Gould and Harris's conception of "liberatory memory work," this chapter further imagines what might constitute emancipation in an archival context. Pulling together the theoretical framing of time in Chapter 1with the empirical focus group data from community archives in Chapter 2 and the participant observation from SAADA in Chapter 3, I delineate three main aspects of liberatory memory work: the temporal, the affective, and the material. I then propose corresponding liberatory objectives for archival theory and practice: chrono-autonomy, self-recognition, and redistribution. I position archivists as liberatory memory workers who have a responsibility to activate records *in the now* in support of temporal, affective, and material justice. Throughout, I argue that community archives must seek liberation from oppressive structures (including the white temporal imaginary), rather than inclusion within them. I conclude by addressing the ethical obligations archivists of all kinds have toward dismantling oppressive systems and building liberatory ones in their stead.

This chapter is, in part, structured along the lines of inquiry proposed by feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser in describing the relationship between what she calls the recognition paradigm and the redistribution paradigm of social justice. Synthesizing decades of debate among critical theorists across disciplines, Fraser asks if social justice is ultimately about cultural parity, and thus can be achieved through recognition, or, if it is about material resources, and thus can be achieved through redistribution. She then intertwines the cultural and material aspects of social justice, insisting that cultural battles for recognition and material battles for redistribution of resources must work in tandem, as "co-fundamental and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice."[2] "Justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition. Neither alone is sufficient," she writes.[3] In so doing, she lays claim to the importance of *both* the recognition of cultural difference and the redistribution of material wealth. She continues:

> The redistribution paradigm focuses on injustices it defines as socio-economic and presumes to be rooted in the economic structure of society… The recognition paradigm, in contrast, targets injustices it understands as cultural, which it presumes to be rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication… In the redistribution paradigm, the remedy for injustice is economic restructuring… In the recognition paradigm, in contrast, the remedy for injustice is cultural or symbolic change.[4]

DOI: 10.4324/9781003001355-5

Fraser proposes a unified approach, encompassing both paradigms and asserting there is, both, "no redistribution without recognition" and "no recognition without redistribution."[5]

As archives are, by their nature, sites of cultural, political, and economic power, it is no surprise here that the conception of archival oppression that I propose includes both cultural misrecognition (through symbolic annihilation) and the maldistribution of resources (through the chronic divestment in minoritized communities). Likewise, my conception of archival liberation includes both cultural recognition (through representational belonging, with the caveat that such recognition is self-recognition from within minoritized communities) and a redistribution of resources (through material reparations). In this way, Fraser gives me the language to organize what I call the affective and materials aspects of archival liberation.

To add to Fraser's framing in the archival context, I also stress the importance of the temporal aspects of liberation, drawing on Charles Mill's conception of white time and Derrick Bell's refusal of white progress narratives as described in Chapter 1. I propose the notion of chrono-autonomy as the temporal orientation of liberatory memory work, enabling minoritized communities to construct their own conceptions of records based on their own conceptions of time, rather than forcing them into dominant Western linear temporalities that rely on particular and singular definitions of records and attendant constraints on their appropriate uses. In my considerations of time, I speculate about the possibilities of new archival theories and practices liberated from the white temporal imaginary and wonder what such temporally-liberated memory organizations might look like given the current constraints of dominant Western archival theory and practice.

This chapter takes speculation as a research methodology, inspired by Marisa Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis's work on building Indigenous knowledge infrastructures through imagination.[6] I am imagining a world to come and trying to compel others to imagine with me. As such, I switch back and forth between descriptive, speculative, and normative statements; I both describe what archivists are doing and speculate about what they *should* do. My hope here is to encourage other archivists to imagine and enact their own liberatory practices rather than simply taking my proposals as a blueprint. Together, let's speculate about building archives that, in the words of Alondra Nelson, simultaneously "ask what was *and* what if?"[7]

Let's start by reimagining time as an aspect of archival liberation, following Bethany Nowviskie's question: is it possible to build "libraries emancipated from what… is often experienced as an externally-imposed, linear and fatalistic conception of time?"[8]

Enacting temporal liberation: chrono-autonomy now

As described in Chapter 1, dominant Western archival theory and practice rely on white and hetero-normative temporalities that both insist on the futurity and fixity of records, and construct the uses of records as steps on a linear progress narrative toward a post-racial white future. As Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated, white time and the archival theory upon which it is based are misaligned with cyclical conceptions

of time constructed by minoritized communities in the United States, as evidenced by the focus group data reported in Chapter 2 and the analysis of SAADA's recent projects in Chapter 3. For these communities, historic oppressions repeat themselves in cycles. Archives have the (largely untapped) potential to interrupt these cycles of oppression by empowering community members to activate records, building corollary moments across space and time. These corollary moments, forged by activating corollary records, can provide concrete activist strategies, inspire current liberation movements, and build solidarities across minoritized communities.

Cyclical temporalities demand different conceptions of records. These conceptions are not bound by dominant Western archival theory's insistence on fixity and futurity, nor do they fetishize the record as evidence of a singular, completed moment in time, from which interventions like processing and use flow forth, linearly and unidirectionally. Yet, as I argued in Chapter 1, there will not be a single conception of record to replace the dominant Western conception; there will be a multitude of conflicting conceptions that reflect the temporal constructions of the communities from which they emerge. For example, Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson, write that, in Indigenous knowledge systems, "records are unmoored from structures of singularity and stasis and oriented toward fluid, ongoing, and often unpredictable temporal paths."[9] Relationality is more important than fixity in this construction. For another example, Jamie Lee's work on queer "(un)becomings" in archives posits records as unstable, unsettled, and unfinished.[10] Likewise, Tonia Sutherland's work on "intangible cultural heritage" in both Trinidadian and Black American performance traditions dispenses with the requirements for fixity and materiality in examining what she calls "event-based records."[11] These conceptions do not rescue dominant Western archival theory by amending it; they dismantle it and propose entirely different and simultaneous genealogies and trajectories.

In Chapter 1, I proposed the term *chronoviolence* to describe the ways that dominant linear temporality attempts to steamroll over the nonlinear temporalities that emerge from minoritized communities. A linear temporality is enforced in a plethora of ways, including, but certainly not limited to, the enactment of dominant Western archival theory and practice, with its reliance on the white temporal imaginary. Here, I propose that the key to disrupting the chronoviolence of white time is *chronoautonomy*. Chronoautonomy enacts a form of temporal justice by acknowledging that minoritized communities construct their own archival temporalities in opposition (or in indifference) to dominant Western archival theory and practice. Chronoautonomy is a refusal or negation of the imposition of white time brought about by colonialism, white supremacy, and hetero-patriarchy. Chronoautonomous communities build their own archives based on their own conceptions of temporalities and their own needs for records. Such theories and practices are most apparent, in the US context, in the varying theories and practices of community archives representing and serving minoritized communities.

Moreover, the extrication of archival theory from the white temporal imaginary sets in motion a series of new archival relationships with time that extend beyond the definition of record. For example, in the realm of archival description, Duff and Harris "would not position archives and records within the numbing strictures of

record keeping… which posit 'the record' as cocooned in a time-bound layering of meaning, and reduce description to the work of capturing and polishing the cocoon."[12] In contrast," they write,

> a liberatory [descriptive] standard would… posit the record as always in the process of being made, the record opening out of the future. Such a standard would not seek to affirm the keeping of something already made. It would seek to affirm… open-ended making and re-making.[13]

Description liberated from white time is fluid, relational, multidirectional, and ongoing.

Nonlinear temporalities also disrupt dominant Western preservation practices that assume the desirability and possibility of "fixing" a record to a particular moment in time with as little degradation as possible for perpetuity. Records change with time in nonlinear temporalities. Liberatory preservation practices accommodate these temporal changes. Trevor Owens's work on digital preservation positions the archivist in an ongoing position of temporal flexibility with the record in the ongoing process of being preserved. He writes, "Nothing has been preserved, there are only things being preserved. Preservation is the result of ongoing work of people and commitments of resources. The work is never finished."[14] Nor is it inevitable. Chronoautonomous communities can decide for themselves the desirability of preservation of interventions based on their own needs, uses, and conceptions of records. Not every record is meant to be kept, nor kept indefinitely.

Most importantly, re-conceptualizing temporality changes the reasons *why* archivists do their work. As Chapter 1 outlined, even the most progressive white archivists have relied on linear progress narratives to explain the impact of their work. By documenting traces of the past in the present, the sentiment goes, we can help bring about some better future, as I described in the previous chapters. Yet, in white time, "the past" and "the future" are both tools of oppression. The past is an excuse; the future is an abdication.

White time constructs the past—and its attendant oppression—as over and done. The white temporal imaginary asserts that we have progressed beyond certain egregious forms of oppression, such as chattel slavery and the genocide of Indigenous people. If we are "post-conflict," to use a term from the international human rights community, then the conflict has ended and we can (and should) move on. Yet, as Black and Indigenous scholars and activists have posited, the past and its attendant oppressions are not over. Chattel slavery has morphed into mass incarceration. Indigenous North Americans are still dispossessed from their land. The "event… is still ongoing," to re-invoke Christina Sharpe's words.[15] Addressing societies in which there is no formal transition from "an authoritarian past to a democratic present," as in Canada and the United States, First Nations scholar Glen Sean Coulthard shows how invocations of "the past" are used to deflect white responsibility in the present. He writes:

> state-sanctioned approaches to reconciliation tend to ideologically fabricate such a transition by narrowly situating the abuses of settler colonialism firmly

> *in the past*. In these situations, reconciliation itself becomes temporally framed as the process of individually and collectively overcoming the harmful 'legacy' left in the wake of this past abuse, while leaving the present structure of colonial rule largely unscathed.[16]

Attempts to frame oppression as "the past" ignore its ongoing reality. The past becomes yet another tool of oppression, a way white people "spectralize" Indigenous people in archives in the words of J.J. Ghaddar, and distance ourselves from and deflect taking responsibility for white supremacy in the present.[17] "The past" is a move toward settler-innocence, as Tuck and Yang might describe it.[18] Dominant Western archival theory and practice, developed in the crucible of white supremacy, rely on and are complicit with this temporal framing, as Chapter 1 detailed; if archivists "preserve traces of the past," then the past is over and preservable, and our responsibility to it is confined to the realm of preserving what has ended and not reckoning with or undoing what is ongoing.

"The future" can be equally oppressive. Archivists in the dominant Western mode of archival theory and practice invoke a vague future as a raison d'etre of archival work; the traces of the past are preserved "for the future" in the dominant formulation. But what if the future never comes? What if, in the words of activist Rasheedah Phillips, the future is "hostile," and "never meant for" oppressed communities?[19] These questions have become all-too-real in the midst of a global pandemic and in the face of looming climate disaster brought on by late capitalism. What if the future can't come soon enough? For people suffering the daily realities of oppression, a more just future is tantalizingly out of reach. As Phillips writes,

> "Radical liberation movements reappropriate notions of time and temporality itself, stealing back time to actively create a vision of the future for marginalized people who are typically denied access to creative control over the temporal mode of the future, and redefining that future's relationship to the past and present."[20]

Yet, for white people, or for those of us inhabiting WEBCCCHAM identities more broadly, "the future," like "the past," works to distance and absolve. Rather than activate records ourselves, or empower others to activate them now through liberatory outreach, archivists in the dominant Western mode shift the use to some ambiguous *other* time. White archivists give ourselves an amnesty, to use Sutherland's term, when we invoke the future, rather than holding ourselves accountable in the now.[21] What Chapters 2 and 3 taught us is that for white archivists to deflect action to "the future" further alienates minoritized communities facing and resisting oppression in the present.

Archivists interested in enacting liberatory memory work may abandon the past and the future for the now. Our labor can be harnessed in the contemporary moment as a disruption of both dominant white progress narratives and cycles of oppression that inequitably target BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. We should engage in liberatory memory work, not with the unrealistic hopes that our

interventions will lead to some brighter future (given our full knowledge of the systems of oppression baked into the institutions that govern society), but rather, with knowledge that doing the work in the now is liberatory in and of itself.

I return here to critical race theorist Derrick Bell, who, as summarized in Chapter 1, argues that American civic, political, and legal institutions are wholly and inevitably white supremacist by design. As a lawyer and legal scholar, Bell shifts the focus of civil rights actions, not on what he conceives to be an unattainable end goal of racial equity, but on the act of resistance itself. To illustrate this point, Bell tells the story of Mrs. MacDonald, a Black woman activist from the American South whom he met in 1964. He asked Mrs. MacDonald where she found the courage and strength to keep fighting despite tremendous odds and a constant threat of racist violence. Her response? Not out of hope for a better future or a sense of progress, but simply, "I lives to harass white folks."[22] As Bell writes:

> her fight, in itself, gave her strength and empowerment in a society that relentlessly attempted to wear her down. Mrs. MacDonald did not even hint that her harassment would topple white's well-entrenched power. Rather, her goal was defiance and gained force precisely because she placed herself in confrontation with her oppressors with full knowledge of their power and their willingness to use it.[23]

Her liberation rested not in the attainment of a future goal, but rather in her current status of resistance; "… at the point she determined to resist her oppression, she was triumphant," Bell asserts.[24] The lesson, he writes, is that "The fight in itself has meaning and should give us hope for the future."[25] Here, Bell is placing liberation outside the white temporal imaginary, resisting the trap of its false notion of racial progress. Instead, for Bell, the state of being in struggle is itself emancipatory.

To be clear, Bell does not advocate that we give up on racial justice activism, but rather, that we shift our understanding of its capacity and aims. It is a both/and rather than either/or approach. He writes,

> On one hand, I urge you to give up the dream of real, permanent racial equality in this country. On the other hand, I urge you to continue the fight against racism… It is a question of both recognition of the futility of action… and the unblinking conviction that something must be done, that action must be taken.[26]

Our resistance is futile; do it anyway because the act of resistance is liberatory, Bell argues.

As the community archives in the previous two chapters taught me, the liberatory memory work we need is not based on a linear progress narrative, it is not based on hope for some future that might never come, it is based on the joy of troublemaking in the present. I am arguing against hope as a practical strategy and/or affective demand of archival labor. Hope is inherently future-oriented; it can be an oppressive affective demand for those whose experiences teach them to be pessimistic about

systemic change in systems designed to oppress.[27] For those of us who inhabit oppressor positionalities, hope breeds complacency; hope is a deferment of responsibility. Instead, taking inspiration from Bell, I am positing that disrupting oppression *in the now* is its own reward. Forget hope for the future, engage in liberatory memory work because it's the right thing for archivists to do right now.

This is an urgent plea, but it also demands careful, considerate, slow work. Urgent and slow are not opposing forces in this conception, but rather work in tandem. Recently, Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson have proposed a shift in the temporal pace of archival work, from the Taylorist demands of "more product, less process" to a slow, deliberate process of relationship building across space and time. Working on a range of tools and practices that extricate Indigenous communities from colonizing archival practices (like Mukurtu and Traditional Knowledge Labels), Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson write:

> The long arc of collecting is not just rooted in colonial paradigms; it relies on and continually remakes those structures of injustice through the seemingly benign practices and process of the [archival] profession. Our emphasis is on one mode of decolonizing processes that insist in a different temporal framework: the slow archives. Slowing down creates a necessary space for emphasizing how knowledge is produced, circulated and exchanged through a series of relationships. Slowing down is about focusing differently, listening carefully, and acting ethically.[28]

While framed as a temporal demand, Christen and Anderson are ultimately calling for a relational shift, one that values building relationships with minoritized communities over counting the number of square feet of records acquired from such communities. In this shift, "Indigenous temporal and spatial frameworks and relations are foregrounded and figure as the driving force for archival practices, process, and systems."[29] These shifts take time, but we need them urgently. Slowness here is not an excuse to do nothing; it is an ethical imperative for acting now.

Here, I want to pushback against claims that urgency is a counterproductive or even oppressive demand. In a useful list of "The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture," developed by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun and publicized by the organization Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), a "sense of urgency" is listed alongside perfectionism, paternalism, and defensiveness as characteristics of white supremacy culture.[30] Although I agree with Jones, Okun, and SURJ that white activists too often prematurely report "highly visible results" to funders at the expense of deep, real, and lasting change, I stand firm that white people must commit to and follow through with liberatory action urgently, not despite, but because, of the enormity of the problem of white supremacy. Five hundred years of power structures will not be dismantled over night, but they will never be dismantled *at all* if white people continue to let ourselves off the hook. We need to use a sense of urgency to hold ourselves to task, as white people, not to claim victories where battles remain.

As these considerations have shown, liberatory memory work requires the dismantling of the white temporal imaginary and its various manifestations in archival

work. Liberation demands a shift from the chronoviolence of dominant Western archival theory to the chronoautonomy of community archives representing and serving minoritized communities. Temporal justice is thus a critical aspect of liberatory memory work that metes out different demands based on our position in the social hierarchy. For archivists occupying WEBCCCHAM positions, temporal justice demands a reorientation to work urgently in the present rather than abdicate responsibility to the past or the future.

Enacting affective liberation: the joy of self-recognition now

In addition to these temporal implications, liberatory memory work has affective demands, both of archival users and archivists. Liberation is a feeling; one can *feel* liberated. As Audre Lorde writes, "I feel, therefore I can be free."[31] I propose here that liberatory memory work revels in joy, even as it shores up anger. For archival users from minoritized communities, liberation relishes the joy of self-recognition in records. For archivists, reorienting our affect toward joy means reveling in troublemaking.[32]

Returning to Nancy Fraser's framing from the introduction of this chapter, liberation seeks a cultural parity that is, for her, best evidenced by a state of recognition—both granting recognition and being recognized. One of social justice's twin goals, in Fraser's estimation is to, "to deinstitutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it."[33] Extending this formulation, community archives enable minoritized communities to participate in cultural life in ways that have been and continue to be impeded by mainstream archives, fostering the kind of "affirmative cultural parity" for which Fraser advocates.

Yet a note of caution is necessary here; formulations of liberatory memory work must ask *who* is doing the recognizing *of whom*. If recognition can only be granted by dominant groups, as embodied by those who inhabit WEBCCCHAM identities, then recognition becomes a trap, a tool of oppression rather than liberation. Writing about the Canadian settler state's formal recognition of Indigenous First Nations and building on the work of Franz Fanon, Glen Sean Coulthard argues that the notion that "recognition" must be "conceived as something that is ultimately 'granted' or 'accorded' a subaltern group or entity by a dominant group or entity" merely replicates colonial relations of extractive power.[34] Coulthard, summarizing Fanon, asks Indigenous people to "transcend the fantasy that the settler-state apparatus—as a structure of domination *predicated* on our ongoing dispossession—is somehow capable of producing liberatory effects."[35] Liberation does not seek inclusion within oppressive systems; it seeks autonomy.

Extending this to archives, it is irrelevant if dominant Western archival theory and/or mainstream archival institutions "recognize" community archives as legitimate; articulations of such recognition or its need only further tip unjust imbalances of power. Instead, liberatory memory work requires *self-recognition*. As Coulthard proposes, liberation requires "the cultural practices of critical individual

and collective *self-recognition* that colonized populations often engage in to empower themselves, instead of relying too heavily on the colonial state and society to do this for them."[36] Community archives do not exist for the benefit of dominant groups; they exist to serve the minoritized community represented in the records they steward. Liberatory memory work based at community archives does not pander to dominant groups for recognition, but rather empowers minoritized communities *to recognize themselves* in archival records.

Furthermore, self-recognition provokes an *affective* response. Liberatory memory work catalyzes joy in our users, even as it documents and acknowledges deeply painful traumas, even as it is inextricably bound to anger at injustice and sadness at loss.[37] Drawing on my work on how community archives counter symbolic annihilation with representational belonging, I am asserting here that it feels good to see one's self and one's community robustly and accurately represented in archives after the experience of being absent, underrepresented, or misrepresented. "Look, I exist!" is a joyful affirmation; I am reminded here of how one South Asian American scholar described her experience encountering SAADA for the first time as "suddenly discovering myself existing."[38] The delight archival users take in self-recognition is a critical aspect of liberatory memory work; liberatory memory work aims to cultivate this kind of joy.

Yet, liberatory memory work demands joy, not just of our users, but of archivists as well.

I am advocating that we take pleasure in liberatory memory work. Confronting oppressive power structures should be joyous. Many Black feminists, from Alice Walker and Audre Lorde to adrienne maree brown, Catherine Knight Steele, and Bettina Love, have written about the longstanding Black cultural practice of feeling joy as a form of resistance to white supremacy.[39] It is liberating to say no. It is liberating to say "enough is enough." It is liberating to be a pain in the ass.[40] It is no surprise that so many recent protests include dance parties. I speak from personal experience when I say it's joyous to walk around the Society of American Archivists' annual meeting giving out posters on how to dismantle white supremacy in archives to dismayed white people.[41] It's fun to have white men in the field openly roll their eyes at you, threaten to boycott your talks, disinvite you when they find out you will be talking about dismantling white supremacy, file complaints of "reverse racism" against you, all of which I have experienced. It means the work is pushing the right buttons.

My assertion of joy in mischief-making runs counter to the ways I have been socialized as a "good" white girl who was raised to follow the rules and please those who hold power over me. Like many white Americans, I am deeply, viscerally conflict-averse, even as I benefit from and replicate structures predicated on conflict. I have learned to see this aversion to conflict as a characteristic of white supremacy and tried instead to find joy in poking authority. Here, I take inspiration from provocateurs like the Guerilla Girls, who disrupt the sexism and racism of art museums by staging antics in gorilla costumes and having *fun*.[42] I wish more archivists would join me in this kind of mischief-making, collectively and strategically.

I urge all archivists to cultivate joy even when, especially when, our work is deadly serious, even when we are righteously motivated by anger. Anger and joy are

not opposites; they are two sides of the same coin, both insisting in action *now*. "Anger is loaded with information and energy," writes the poet-saint Audre Lorde.[43] Information and energy can change the world, while hope quietly waits it out, deferring action to some other time that might never come. Harkening back to Derrick Bell, I am not motivated by a hope that the world will get better; I engage in liberatory memory work anyway because it's the right thing to do, now. The temporal and affective demands of liberatory memory work unite in this imperative.

My insistence on the joy of rabble-rousing persists despite the very serious consequences we face in fighting oppression, and in acknowledgment that those consequences are not equitably distributed, and, unsurprisingly, are meted out across racialized and gendered lines. I write from the privilege of tenured American whiteness. Of course, particularly for people from dominant groups like white people in the United States, our joy must always be tied to *material* consequences, or else we risk hedonistically reinforcing the power structures we seek to dismantle. I am not proposing fun for fun's sake; I am proposing fun for the sake of liberation.

Enacting material liberation: redistribution now

The temporal and affective aspects of liberatory memory work I just described are little more than hollow gestures without the material aspects. In Fraser's framing, the recognition brought about by cultural parity (which I have further refined to examine the affective impact of self-recognition in archives) must be paired with redistribution of resources to bring about meaningful change. As Fraser asserts, "Maldistribution is entwined with misrecognition but cannot be reduced to the later."[44] I echo this demand for material redistribution and here identify two critical components of material redistribution for liberatory memory work: redistribution in society writ large and in the archival realm specifically. In the American context, liberatory memory work must support the activation of records for reparations for Black people and land reclamation for Indigenous people. Focusing more narrowly on archival practice, liberatory memory work must support the redistribution of resources from well-endowed predominantly white, elitist institutions to chronically underfunded community archives that serve and represent minoritized communities.

As described in the previous chapter, in 2016 I was part of a group of three American memory workers—Jarrett Drake, the now late Doria Johnson (who is deeply missed), and myself—who formed a delegation to participate in the Nelson Mandela Centre's international dialogue series on how to use memory-for-justice in post-conflict societies. Participation in this series posed a temporal challenge for us as Americans: how do you relate to memory workers in post-conflict societies, when you come from a society which is not only *not* post-conflict, but fully in the midst of a 500-year-old conflict that (at least in 2016) most white Americans do not even acknowledge? It became nearly impossible to relate to our colleagues from places like Bosnia, Rwanda, and Argentina, places where there had been a clear-break, a regime change, an official reversal of policy, followed by a public

accounting for crimes, and, to varying degrees, a formal mechanism for reparations, redistribution, and/or justice.

To reflect on this disorienting experience, the three of us co-authored an essay that advocates for what we called a "liberation theology for memory work." This brief essay helped us make sense of our experiences and laid the groundwork for this chapter by outlining temporal, affective, and material concerns. Our essay states:

> The past was never singular, nor will the future be. In order to generate these futures, memory work should be dangerous. It should seek not only to acknowledge past trauma, but to repair it. It should aim to upend hierarchies of power, to distribute resources more equitably, to enable complex forms of self-representation, and to restore the humanity of those for whom it has been denied.[45]

This frames the stakes of liberatory memory work, extending the boundaries of such work well beyond formal sites of knowledge production and transmission, such as archives, libraries, and museums. What is at stake, ultimately, is not just how we remember the past, but how we distribute power—its temporal, affective, and material instantiations—in the present. The archives, and its impact, know no bounds.

After this general outlining of the stakes of liberatory memory work, we then specified what this means for US memory workers. In the contemporary American context, given the two foundational sins of the United States—the genocide of Indigenous people and the enslavement of African people—we wrote that liberatory memory work must seek to repair these harms by activating records in service of movements for material reparations for descendants of enslaved Africans and for Indigenous sovereignty and land reclamation. We wrote:

> In our immediate context, in the wake of a disastrous American election, [liberatory memory work] means using our skills as archivists, public historians, and academics to end the state-sponsored murder and mass incarceration of Black people and the continued genocide and displacement of Indigenous peoples, to dismantle systems of white supremacy, to actively resist the oppression of the most vulnerable amongst us, and to re-envision forms of justice that repair and restore rather than violate and harm individuals and communities.[46]

Herein lies the tangible, material answer for the question of what liberatory memory work can accomplish—nothing less than the redistribution of wealth and land in support of Black and Indigenous liberation struggles.

Memory workers, and archivists in particular, can take a lead role in the movement for material reparations for the descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States. As historian Ana Lucia Araujo has painstakingly chronicled, enslaved people themselves, across the Americas and Caribbean, demanded "redress" and "compensation" for their enslavement, and how the movement demanding reparations has

been active since the 1700s.[47] These are not new radical demands, they are old radical demands. And they are gaining traction in the United States. At the time of writing, several Democratic lawmakers are calling for a bill to develop proposals for reparations for African Americans. There is much debate about what forms these reparations might take, including direct cash payments to the descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States. As several prison abolitionists have made clear the deep connections between enslavement and the ongoing scourge of police violence and mass incarceration, any movement toward material reparation for Black Americans must be linked to dismantling the police and the prison industrial complex to have lasting material liberatory consequences.

If archivists think outside of the confines of neutrality and the constraints of professionalism, we can take part in this struggle. Archivists are experts on records. We can use our expertise in records to communicate their potential and their shortcomings, what got recorded and what did not, and why. We can activate the records in our care in support of efforts toward material reparations for descendants of enslaved Africans. We can provide space for descendants of enslaved people to publicize their legal claims for reparations, as archivists at Shift Design and the *Texas After Violence* Project did in 2019 in a public conversation with Tamara Lanier, who is suing Harvard University for ownership of daguerreotypes taken of her enslaved ancestors.[48] If we are employed by institutions with such oppressive policies and procedures, we can refuse to abide by them and make our refusals public. We can also describe the records that we do have in ways that aid descendants in making legal claims. In 2012, I wrote an article in *The Journal of Documentation* about how archivists in Cambodia did exactly that, enact liberatory descriptive practices to aid survivors of the Khmer Rouge in making the legal case for genocide.[49] By describing records of victims by their ethnic identity, Cambodian archivists successfully helped lawyers prove certain ethnic groups were targeted for mass murder. We can connect the exciting conversations going on about anti-racist archival re-description with movements for legal and material redress, as the Archives for Black Lives group has begun to do.[50]

We can mobilize the records in our care regarding previous successful claims to reparation to show that material reparations are not unrealistic dreams, but have historical precedent. Nazi records were used to figure out which Holocaust survivors were entitled to payment from the German Claims Conference.[51] US government records were used to figure out which Japanese Americans were incarcerated during WWII and entitled to a cash payment.[52] Cambodian archivists have activated records in their care to both convince U.N. officials to launch a tribunal and provide evidence to convict Khmer Rouge officials of genocide.[53] Archivists have done this before. We can do it again, more concertedly, and on a larger scale.

Returning to the second American original sin, liberatory memory work in the US context must also bolster Indigenous sovereignty and land reclamation. Maria Montenegro describes how archivists can support Indigenous communities in gathering, repurposing, and recontextualizing records in claims for federal recognition, while at the same time "using archival theory and expertise to challenge the presumed legitimacy and authority of extant non-Indigenously-created historical evidence contained in settler colonial archives."[54] Records can be activated as

evidence in land claims, while simultaneously, archival theory can be used to change oppressive legislation that locates authority solely in the written records of the colonizing state.

It is paramount to stress that liberatory memory work makes *material* demands of us. In their generative 2012 article, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang trouble any easy preconceived notions we might have about decolonization being an intellectual exercise.[55] For Tuck and Yang, decolonization is neither about using more palatable terminology in a database built on white supremacist logic, nor is it about "repatriating" digital copies of records to their source communities. Decolonization does not provide cultural competency training for white archivists so that they can then extract knowledge from communities of color more fluently. As Tuck and Yang argue, decolonization *is* about giving back stolen land. In this framing, "decolonizing the archives" entails nothing less than activating records to support Indigenous claims to land and sovereignty. Archivists can intervene here, as Maria Montenegro describes, by shoring up evidence to trace the histories of dishonored treaties, by activating records for public support, and by disrupting the white supremacist logics on which settler colonial records claim sole legitimacy.

I have now outlined two ambitious material imperatives for liberatory memory work in the US context. I want to add to these imperatives a more specific demand for material redistribution as it pertains to the funding of archives. Building on Chapters 2 and 3 focus on community archives, I call for a redistribution of resources away from large predominantly white cultural institutions toward community-based archives representing and serving minoritized communities. As Bergis Jules has noted, foundations, government agencies, and high net-worth individual donors have all, until very recently, excluded community archives from the funding sources on which mainstream museums and archives rely.[56] White supremacy, as evidenced in extended divestment from the communities served and represented by community archives, extractive relationships with universities, and the biases of funding agencies, has caused the chronic under-funding of community archives. Meanwhile, funding structures based on the logics of capitalism and white supremacy have resulted in an over-investment in predominantly white cultural institutions that house mainstream archives. For example, I have seen an L.A.-based community archives launch a life-changing exhibition on a $12,000 annual budget organized by an army of volunteers while, across town in an hour of traffic, the Getty Center spends millions conserving every last trace of white male detritus that very few, if any, people, will ever touch, by design. Decisions about what to keep, how to describe it, and how to activate it should not be made solely by educated white people walled up in a white marble fortress in the hills of Brentwood; the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities that sustain community archives should have access to the same amount and sources of funding to make autonomous decisions about their own materials. I am echoing here Bergis Jules's call for government agencies and foundations to take the work of community archives seriously and make it their mission to reallocate resources from mainstream institutions to community-based ones. The impact of such a reallocation would be astounding, as

community archives would be able to pay for dedicated staff and infrastructure, extending their scope and reach beyond our current imaginations.

The material aspects of liberatory memory work entail activating archives in support of the redistribution of land and resources to communities that have been sites of capitalist and colonialist extraction. Furthermore, liberatory memory work demands a radical redistribution of the resources that make archival work possible, moving funding away from large predominantly white institutions, and toward the community archives that represent and serve BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities.

Dismantle and build

Now that I have laid out a blueprint of sorts of liberatory memory work, I want to address archivists' dual role in dismantling oppressive structures and building liberatory structures, building on Maria Cotera's insistence that a critical digital praxis demands both.[57] To engage in liberatory memory work, we must simultaneously dismantle and build.

I am often asked by archivists working for mainstream institutions how they can "help" community archives, the question often being phrased as if community archives are running some kind of deficit that needs to be corrected and/or are positioned as objects in need of rescue or salvation.[58] To those who ask this question in this way, my answer is simply, "just leave them alone," as nothing good can come for community archives from those kinds of colonialist, extractive interactions. Another response might be to learn from them, as mainstream archives can learn much from the innovative practices community archives have forged. As archivists for mainstream institutions are slowly coming to terms with their own fiscal precarity, they could learn much from the creative strategies communities have created in order to survive without generous parent organizations and wealthy donors. Outreach, engagement, and access are other key areas that mainstream archives can emulate community archives practices, as community archives have done a much better job articulating their importance to the communities they serve and represent than mainstream archives have done. Across the board, archivists for mainstream institutions must be careful to respect, and not co-opt, or extract, community practices.

A much better question, one that white archivists working for mainstream institutions *should* be asking, is how they can engage in liberatory memory work. Fred Moten, writing in the context of the debate about reparations for the descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States, states, that, "what it is that is supposed to be repaired is irreparable. It can't be repaired. The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new."[59] Moten provides us with the perfect answer to what white archivists (and those inhabiting WEBCCCHAM identities more broadly) should be doing: "tear shit down completely and build something new." Dismantle archival concepts, practices, and institutions based on chronoviolence, symbolic annihilation, and maldistribution. Build concepts, practices, and institutions that empower people from minoritized communities with chronoautonomy, self-recognition, and redistribution of resources. Activate records for temporal, affective, and material justice.

For me, shifting toward liberatory memory work has meant both critiquing dominant Western archival theories and practices and enacting new ways of thinking and doing archives through my work with SAADA. As this book has demonstrated, community archives work is not inherently liberatory; community archives can easily be seduced by the traps of respectability and replicate the oppressive practices of dominant institutions. But in no other type of memory institution is the potential for imagining liberation and enacting structural change so real.

I would like to address the role of white people specifically, because I am a white person, like 87% of American archivists.[60] We must acknowledge our positionalities and admit they we do not all come equally to this table. In 2019, I published an article in the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* about using feminist standpoint epistemologies to dismantle dominant archival appraisal paradigms and rebuild appraisal theory through the lens of oppressed positionalities.[61] The approach I proposed, which I call feminist standpoint appraisal, is liberatory in that it inverts dominant appraisal hierarchies that value records created by those in power to justify and consolidate their power at the expense of records created by the oppressed to document and resist their oppression and imagine liberation. Feminist standpoint appraisal explicitly and unapologetically gives epistemological weight (thereby assigning value to) records created and preserved by, and potentially activated in service to, those individuals and communities oppressed by white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and capitalism. Furthermore, feminist standpoint appraisal shifts our thinking about the position of the archivist, from a purportedly objective "view from nowhere" (which in fact belies a dominant but unnamed white male position), toward a socially located, culturally situated agent who centers ways of being and knowing from the margins. Feminist standpoint appraisal, as I have formulated it, calls on archivists who inhabit dominant identities to acknowledge their *oppressor* standpoints and actively work to dismantle them.

For archivists from dominant groups like white archivists, liberatory memory work should be less about claiming an oppressed standpoint and more about owning up to our *oppressor* standpoints. It will entail naming and dismantling the oppression that creates our privilege in the first place. This political moment in the US context, the culmination of 500 years of white supremacy, demands that we, as white people, take responsibility for this history and work to undo its legacy in the present.

Liberatory work is complicated. It is "unsettling," to use Tuck and Yang's term about decolonization. It is discomforting for those of us who inhabit oppressor positions. It should be. Liberatory memory work demands radical shifts in oppressive structures. These structures must be dismantled, not redecorated. We do not need new curtains on the plantation windows, to contradict Hope Olson's take on Audre Lorde's metaphor.[62] Liberatory memory work requires a radical break and repair, a simultaneous dismantling and a rebuilding, a foundational theoretical shift in support of radical temporal, affective, and material claims.

Following both Cotera and Moten, we must dismantle the structures that harm. This requires a different temporal orientation for archivists, who have framed their work for the long haul of a future that might never come. We must shift to focusing on building a liberatory now.

Archival theories, practices, and institutions that commit chronoviolence, that symbolically and actually annihilate minoritized people, and that further the maldistribution of material resources must be wholly un-done. As I described in the introduction, in 2016, in the aftermath of Trump's election, I designed an exercise for my introductory master's students to collectively identify examples of white privileges in archives and strategies concrete steps for dismantling those privileges. I commissioned my doctoral student Gracen Brilmyer to design a poster that encapsulated this exercise, and then I printed out the poster, distributed it at the 2017 Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, and made it freely available online for others to print and display.[63] The poster lists some helpful actions for white archivists to take, like "hire and retain more archivists of color," "work collaboratively with communities of color," "compensate communities of color for their labor" and "disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and make budgetary decisions."[64] These are useful tasks that white archivists working for predominantly white institutions can take, but, writing from the hindsight of 2020, they do not go far enough. These are too much like "new curtains" strategies, not enough like "knock it down and start over" solutions.

Saidiya Hartman, writing in the middle of the intertwined COVID-19 crisis and the ongoing struggle for Black lives, argues:

> The possessive investment in whiteness can't be rectified by learning "how to be more antiracist." It requires a radical divestment in the project of whiteness and a redistribution of wealth and resources. It requires abolition, the abolition of the carceral world, the abolition of capitalism. What is required is a remaking of the social order, and nothing short of that is going to make a difference.[65]

Liberation demands *structural* change. Liberation changes the *structures* of archives. Remaking the world with and through archives requires more than discrete strategies that rely on the good will of white people. White people cannot be educated out of racism; the only way out is for us to give up power. We need comprehensive solutions that dismantle oppressive institutions by making obsolete the logics of harm upon which they have been based. This imperative is bigger than archives; most mainstream archives, after all, are located within universities and government agencies that serve as even greater engines of oppression. A liberatory archives is impossible in an oppressive world.

As this chapter has argued, remaking the world requires temporal, affective, and material shifts simultaneously. Liberatory memory work will require us to dismantle archival systems based on chronoviolence, symbolic annihilation, and maldistribution of resources, even as we build archival systems based on chronoautonomy, self-recognition, and material redistribution.

This work is slow *and* urgent, messy, and strategic. It is imperfect, uncomfortable work. Let us build a liberatory memory work that is not seduced by a false sense of hope nor an easy sense of solidarity, but instead one that "unsettles" those of us who inhabit oppressor positionalities, that is simultaneously material, affective, and

temporal, and that takes great, messy pleasure in mobilizing records to cultivate disruption in oppressive systems.

Notes

1 Ideas from this chapter were presented at three different conferences: "Temporal Belongings: The Social Life of Time" conference at University of Edinburgh in June 2018; the Archival Education and Research Institute at the University of Liverpool in July 2019; and the Association of Canadian Archivists Annual Meeting, held virtually in June 2020. The latter talk was published as "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work: On the Archival Uses of Joy and Anger," *Archivaria* 90 (Fall 2020).
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4 Ibid., 13.
5 Ibid., 65–66.
6 Marisa Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis, "Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 53 (2015): 677–702.
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17 J.J. Ghaddar, "The Spectre in the Archive: Truth, Reconciliation and Indigenous Archival Memory," *Archivaria* 82 (Fall 2016): 3–26.
18 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1(1) (2012): 1–40.
19 Rasheedah Phillips, "Organize Your Own Temporality," (July 3, 2017), https://organizeyourown.wordpress.com/2017/07/03/organize-your-own-temporality-by-rasheedah-phillips/.
20 Ibid.
21 Tonia Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional and Restorative Justice," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1(2) (2017), https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/42.
22 Derrick Bell, *The Derrick Bell Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 76.
23 Ibid., 77.
24 Ibid., 90.

25 Ibid., 76.
26 Ibid., 90.
27 I am arguing against what I see as an oppressive investment in "radical hope" in the wake of the Trump election. For an example of this kind of wistful thinking disguised as activism, see: Carolina De Robertis, ed. *Radical Hope: Letters of Love and Dissent in Dangerous Times* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017).
28 Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson, "Towards Slow Archives," *Archival Science* 19 (2019): 87.
29 Ibid., 91
30 Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups* (*ChangeWork*, 2001) as republished in Showing Up for Racial Justice, "The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture," https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html.
31 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2007), 38.
32 This work on the affective dimensions of liberation owes a debt of gratitude to the archival studies scholars who have been studying affect in archives for the past few years: Marika Cifor, who first gave us the language to talk about affect in archival studies; Jennifer Douglas, who has opened up new lines of inquiry around grief in records; and Rebecka Sheffield, who explores the "cruel optimism" of sustaining community archives. Without their work, we, as a field, would not be taking feelings seriously. Marika Cifor, "Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Studies to Archival Discourse," *Archival Science* 16(1) (2016): 7–31; Jennifer Douglas, Alex Alisasuskas, and Devon Mordell, "'Treat Them With the Reverence of Archivists:' Records Work, Grief Work and Relationship Work in the Archives," *Archivaria* 88 (Fall 2019): 84–120; Tonia Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional and Restorative Justice," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1(2) (2017), https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/42; Rebecka Taves Sheffield, "Archival Optimism, Or How to Sustain a Community Archives," In *Community Archives, Community Spaces: Heritage, Memory and Identity*, eds. Jeannette Bastian and Andrew Flinn (London: Facet, 2020), 3–20; Jamie A. Lee, "Be/Longing in the Archival Body: Eros and the 'Endearing' Value of Material Lives," *Archival Science* 16(1) (2016): 33–51. Outside of the archival studies realm, my focus on joy is inspired by adrienne maree brown's insistence that activism should be pleasurable, drawing on the Black feminist traditions from which she emerges. adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019).
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34 Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 30–31.
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59 Fred Moten in Stefano Harney, and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 152. For a take on what reparative archives entails, see: Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5 (2018), Article 6.
60 Robin H. Israel and Jodi Reeves Eyre, "The 2017 WArS/SAA Salary Survey: Initial Results and Analysis," (2017), https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/WArS-SAA-Salary-Survey-Report.pdf.
61 Michelle Caswell, "Dusting for Fingerprints: Introducing Feminist Standpoint Appraisal," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3(1) (2020), https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/113/67.

62 Olson writes that the master's house is in need of "serious redecorating." Hope Olson, "Patriarchal Structures of Subject Access and Subversive Techniques for Change," *The Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 26(2/3) (2001): 22; Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 110–113.
63 Michelle Caswell (with graphic design by Gracen Brilmyer). "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in the Archives Classroom," *Library Quarterly* 87(3) (2017), special issue "Aftermath: Libraries and the U.S. Election": 222–235. The poster is available at http://gracenbrilmyer.com/dismantling_whiteSupremacy_archives3.pdf.
64 Ibid.
65 Saidiya Hartman, Interview, *ArtForum* (July 14, 2020), https://www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579?fbclid=IwAR2IGYVm6tQWu25vD_sXMzCoD1gxN1YILPmbU2KM4KZf4I3RH4zIXNrC4oc.

Conclusion

Liberation now!

In 2018, as the ideas in this book were taking shape, I reached out to some colleagues in an attempt to mobilize collective action for archival liberation. Calling ourselves the Archivists Against History Repeating Itself Collective (or the Archivists Against Collective for short), we formed a purposefully informal group of archivists and archival studies scholars who are working toward dismantling oppressive archival practices and imaging and enacting new liberatory archival practices. Thanks to the design expertise of Gracen Brilmyer, we launched a website (http://www.archivistsagainst.org) with readings, resources, and activities designed to un-do dominant ways of thinking and being in archives and conjure up new archival worlds. The idea was to leverage the "Identifying and Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives," exercises I had come to be known for to inspire broader and more intensive action against intersecting oppressions.

Looking back, more than two years later, the Archivists Against Collective's opening statement provided a clear blueprint for this book. Working on behalf of the Collective, I wrote:

> Archives should be tools for liberation. We are a group of archivists and archival studies scholars who are tired of seeing the same oppressive ideologies, structures, and tactics play out in both the historic records we steward and the newspaper headlines we read every day. We are trying to move beyond the disjuncture between the frantic pace of inundating crisis and the long game of archival slow-time. We want to use archival records to learn past strategies and get inspiration to enact structural change we need *now*.[1]

Importantly, the statement pushed back against the detached professionalism many of us have been trained to emulate, describing that "we are exhausted by the use of professionalism as an excuse for political inaction."[2] Instead, we offered that our professional ethical commitments demand political engagement.

Since its founding, the Collective has worked in fits and starts, powered by a dozen or so dedicated volunteers. Our website hosts some important exercises for archivists working against climate change created by Itza Carbajal and Ted Lee and our reading list plots a history of liberatory thinking in archives. And yet, the Collective has not done nearly enough. My strengths, I have come to accept, are in

DOI: 10.4324/9781003001355-6

building theory rather than in organizing. The Uprisings for Black lives in the summer of 2020 suggest to me that now is perhaps not the right time for multiracial activist-archivist coalitions, that what is needed instead are identity-based autonomous zones of archival activism, that is, white archivists working to dismantle their own white supremacy and that of their fellow white archivists, while Black archivists organizing around centering Black experiences in memory work.[3] The Archivists Against Collective lies in wait, ready for the right time to spring to action. I hope this book catalyzes that moment, in myself and others.

Such action would answer the calls of *Urgent Archives*. This book has expressed a temporality of urgency surrounding the work of archivists and memory organizations more broadly. Archives, I have argued, are neither about the safety of the past nor the distance of the future, but about enacting political change *right now*. In order to transform dominant archival practices into liberatory memory work, we must rethink and re-do the foundational oppressive concepts and structures upon which dominant Western archival theory and practice is based.

The introduction to this book, *Community archives: assimilation, integration, or resistance?* set the stakes for the importance of memory work through the lens of my own community archives practice with SAADA. Using the artistic activation of one record as an example, the introduction demonstrated how minoritized communities can coalesce around reinterpretations of records activated during reoccurring moments of oppression.

Chapter One: A matter of time: archival temporalities, addressed the temporal implications of linear Christian progress narratives on dominant Western archival theory and practice, calling these linear temporalities "white time" because of their alignment with white imaginaries about post-racial futures. I argued that the imposition of these linear temporalities performs a form of "chronoviolence" on non-dominant ontologies and epistemologies. After summarizing a host of cyclical temporalities, I asked us to imagine archival theories and practices liberated from the white temporal imaginary, such as new conceptions of records that do not rely on fixity and futurity. Influenced by the work of critical race theorist Derrick Bell, I ask that, in an American context, we disrupt white temporal imaginaries of racial progress, and instead envision US history as ongoing cycles of oppression baked into foundational structures and systems.

In *Chapter Two: Community archives interrupting time* I present empirical data from focus groups I conducted with users of community archives serving and representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people and communities of color to show how such communities are constructing their own cyclical conceptions of time in the current political moment. Across communities and community archives' sites, these focus groups revealed a prevailing sense that the historic trauma communities had suffered not only was never addressed and redressed, but that the same oppressive tactics communities experienced decades ago were being used in the current moment, that white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy were manifesting in the same ways as they had in the past, and that oppression that community elders had experienced as young people was happening to young people in the community again now. Yet, I also argued that members of minoritized communities were forging corollary moments across space and time by activating corollary records from their communities' past for political

strategy in the present. Drawing on rich quotes that enable these community members to speak for themselves, that chapter showed how community archives are constructing a new conception of time, one in which archives have the potential to interrupt and change cycles of oppression if they are catalyzed in the now.

Chapter Three: From representation to activation returned to SAADA as a research site to discuss both the importance and limits of representation of minoritized communities in archives. I proposed the concepts of "recuperative collecting" and "representational collecting" to describe the ways that community archives enact liberatory appraisal to counter the annihilation—symbolic and actual—of the communities they represent and serve. Despite the importance of being able to see one's self in history, I argued that community archives must pair representational practices with the liberatory activation of records to interrupt the white temporal imaginary rather than pander to white notions of respectability. Through liberatory activation, I argued, archives catalyze uses of records that seek to dismantle systems of oppression and imagine and enact new possible worlds.

Drawing on Gould and Harris's conception of "liberatory memory work," *Chapter Four: Imagining liberatory memory work* laid out the temporal, affective, and material demands of archival liberation. I posited that we need a radical overhaul of the foundational concepts of archival theory and practice. We must simultaneously dismantle systems based on chronoviolence, symbolic annihilation, and the maldistribution of resources, and build new systems based on the principles of chronoautonomy, self-recognition, and material redistribution. I shift the temporal need for these new systems, placing them not in a future that might never come, but in the urgency of the present. I asked the readers to join me in conceiving of and enacting these new liberatory archival worlds.

This book has been an invitation to re-think and re-do together, rather than a definitive guide. I have walked you through my decade-long journey to better understand *why* archives are important and how they can be *even more* important. As I conclude, I ask you to join me in asking "what if?" What if we transformed the composition of our field so that it was no longer overwhelmingly white? What if we transformed our MLIS programs and archival studies scholarship so that they no longer legitimate and perpetuate dominant Western definitions of core concepts like record, evidence, provenance, ownership, and access, at the expense of non-dominant ways of knowing? What if we re-centered our collection development policies to focus on building relationships of trust with those who have been excluded? What if we stopped uncritically asserting the value of open access over and above culturally appropriate protocols for the treatment of sensitive materials, such as materials created unwittingly and unwillingly about Indigenous communities? What if we created new strategies that center Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ+ communities in setting priorities, that own up to the problematic legacies and presents of archival institutions, that enable minoritized communities to represent themselves, to counter the ways in which they have been symbolically annihilated by dominant collecting, description, and access regimes? What if we advocated for a redistribution of resources so that community archives could better sustain their vital work? What if we let go of the oppressive

concepts and systems and structures we have inherited as a profession and imagined a new way of doing things?

What if, what if, what if?

This question could be a catalyst for a profound shift for our profession, a shift from being stuck in the status quo of routinized practice to enacting a new world of possibilities, a world where our practice, our values, and our labor are transformational; a world where archives are tools for human liberation.

The new what-if archival worlds we imagine will be radically different from our current realities, more so than we might even be able to speculate about right now. Jack Halberstam writes,

> We cannot say what new structures will replace the ones we live with yet, because once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming.[4]

I do not know exactly what liberatory archives will look like yet (despite the three themes I delineated in the previous chapter), nor do I think I should be their sole architect. I do know, however, that community archives are getting us one step closer to the archival world we need.

The "liberatory memory work" framing demands that we *work*. Our task—activating archives for human liberation—is not easy. It is a struggle, one that demands action, particularly from those of us who currently reap the privileges of oppression. Such actions will be wild, impractical, impossible. What I have provided here is a provocation, a tough love letter, a theoretical blueprint, not a step-by-step to-do list. Readers will have to translate and transform this provocation into discrete action items based on their own personal positionalities and collective strategizing. What I am offering here frees us to envision and enact new liberatory worlds even as we dismantle old ways of being and doing.

Records, if conceived of and activated for liberatory aims, have the power to change ourselves and the world. Returning to the story of artist Zain Alam's reuse of the Dhillonn wedding home movies as told in this book's introduction, records enable us "to see ourselves in a new light, despite differences of time and space." "What more can you ask for?" Alam questioned.[5] We can ask to mobilize this new way of seeing ourselves and others for our mutual co-liberation from ongoing cycles of oppression.

This book has proposed a new temporal paradigm for archival work, rooted in the urgency of the current political moment. Let's harness archival labor urgently to disrupt both dominant white progress narratives and the cycles of oppression that inequitably target BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. Let's dismantle archives based on chronoviolence, misrecognition, and maldistribution of resources. Let's build archives based on chronoautonomy, self-recognition, and redistribution. And let us do this now, urgently.

Liberatory memory work demands nothing less than remaking the world. It is Sisyphean. Let's remember the wisdom of Mrs. MacDonald and do it anyway (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Photo of graffiti, Oakland, California, August 2020. Image appears courtesy of Esmat Elhalaby.

Notes

1 Archivists Against Collective, http://www.archivistsagainst.org/.
2 Ibid.
3 See the important statement, "A Call to Action: Archiving State-Sponsored Violence Against Black People," as an example of Black-led archival activism. Zakiya Collier, et al, "A Call to Action: Archiving State-Sponsored Violence Against Black People," (June 6,2020), "https://medium.com/community-archives/call-to-action-archiving-state-sanctioned-violence-against-black-people-d629c956689a.
4 Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons," In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, eds. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 6.
5 Ibid.

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