3

History, Memory, and Power

The concepts and theories presented in this chapter are very important within the field of archivism. They are often heavily discussed in professional publications and conferences. Often, they can be contentious and difficult even for professional archivists to discuss. You are not asked to agree with everything presented in this chapter. Instead, this chapter is intended to familiarize you with major concepts and conversations that you will undoubtedly encounter as you enter the field.

In this chapter, you will learn to:

- Define "archival silences" and explain the reasons they occur
- Describe the effects that archival silences may have on archives' users, on community members, and on our shared histories and knowledge
- Explain the ways "community archives" differ from institutional archives
- Identify and describe major recommendations from the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials
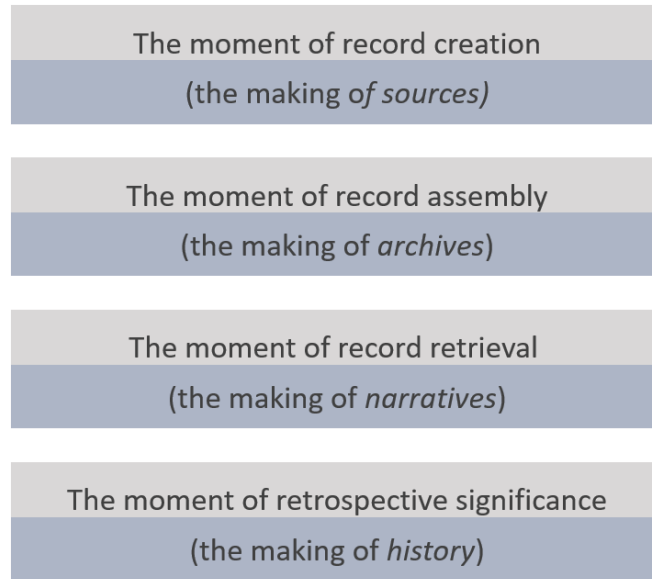
Additional vocabulary to look for:

- Symbolic annihilation
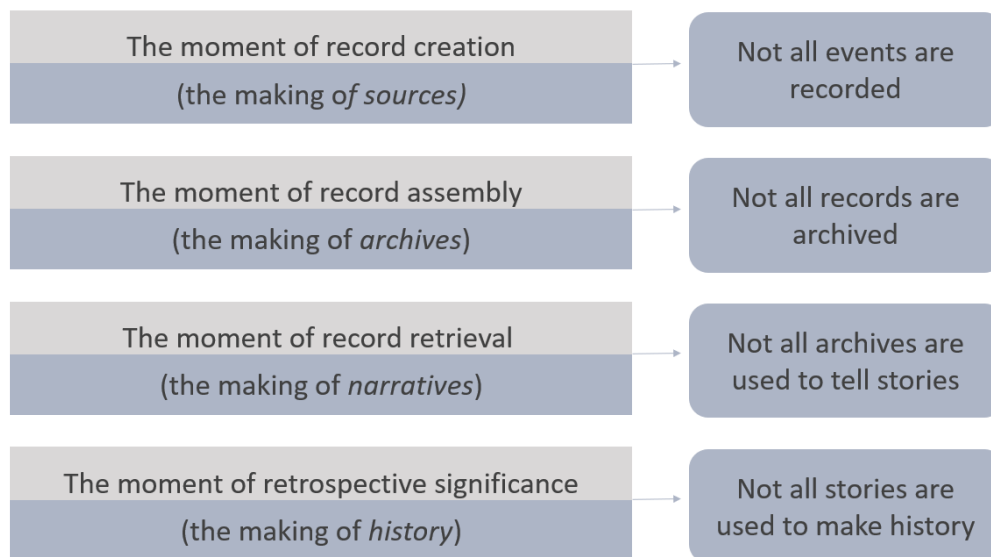- Representational belonging
- Post-custodial

ARCHIVAL SILENCES

This chapter is structured around a framework proposed by anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his book, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995). In this book, Trouillot discusses the process of "historical production," referring to the ways we develop our commonly shared beliefs and understandings about history.

Trouillot asserts that there are *silences* that occur in this process at four key moments:

The moment of record creation
(the making of *sources)*

The moment of record assembly
(the making of *archives*)

The moment of record retrieval
(the making of *narratives*)

The moment of retrospective significance
(the making of *history*)

Archivist Michelle Caswell expands on Trouillot's framework in her book, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (2014). Caswell explains how the four silences relate to archives:

The moment of record creation		Not all events are recorded
(the making of *sources)*	→	

The moment of record assembly		Not all records are archived
(the making of *archives*)	→	

The moment of record retrieval		Not all archives are used to tell stories
(the making of *narratives*)	→	

The moment of retrospective significance		Not all stories are used to make history
(the making of *history*)	→	

In Trouillot's model, the "making of narratives" refers to the process of putting forth a single historical argument, like writing an article in an academic journal. The "making of history" refers to the broader process by which historical narratives become accepted by the general public as commonly held beliefs, written into our textbooks, or memorialized in statues and museums.

In the framework presented above, both Caswell and Trouillot actually use the word *fact* rather than *record* – as in "the moment of fact creation," "the moment of fact assembly," and so on. However, I dispute this usage, for minor semantic reasons.

As we will see, the word "fact" or "record" in this framework refers to individual points of data, bits of information, or pieces of evidence that can be assembled and used to create historical narratives. But consider the image in Figure 3.1.

What *fact* is represented in this historic document?

Without knowledge of the date, location, or circumstances of the photo's creation, the most we could say is, "A dog once wore a top hat." Different historians could find very different meaning in this image, depending on whether they study photography, fashion, or pet culture through history.
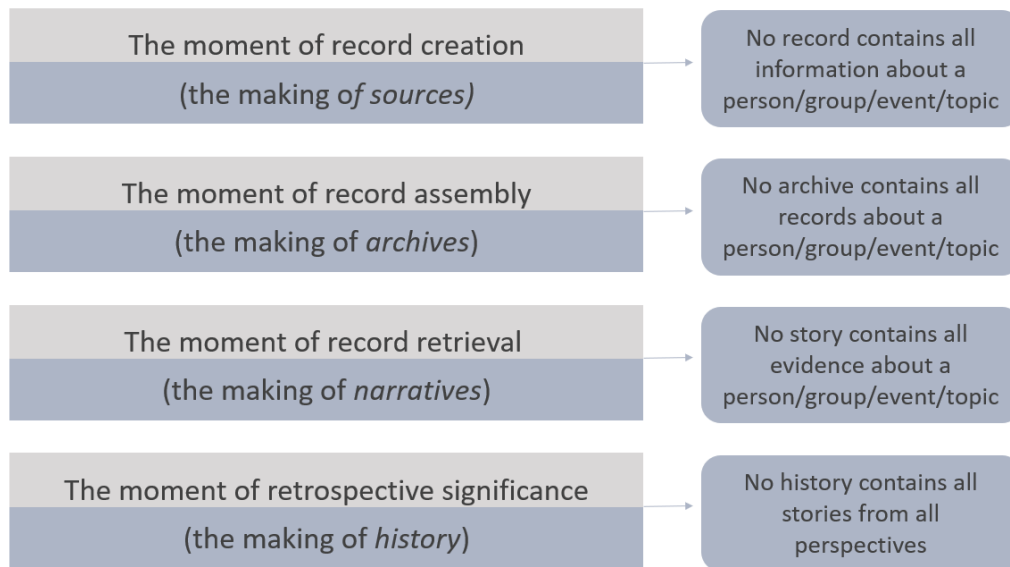
Figure 3.1 - Dog in top hat

I would argue that "fact" is more synonymous with "narrative" in Trouillot's framework. What fact is evidenced in a particular document depends on the synthesis of other contextualizing information, and the meaning or significance of that fact depends on how it is used. I contend that *record* is a more appropriate term in this framework, according to the definition of record we saw in Chapter 2 ("information, stored on a medium, that can be useful as historical evidence").

Importantly, each of the moments that Trouillot identifies are also moments when a subjective decision may be made that affects what is ultimately accepted as historical knowledge. When a photographer takes a picture, they decide what to include or exclude from the frame. When a historian writes an article, they decide which pieces of evidence are relevant to their argument. Archivists decide which collections are preserved, and, for some reason, politicians decide which versions of history will be taught in our schools. Each of these individuals brings to their decisions their own background, values, and perspectives.

Recognizing and acknowledging where silences occur in the production of history is not always a negative criticism. To a certain extent, these silences are inherent to the nature of history, memory, and information. Despite our best efforts and intentions, there is a limit to how much material our archives can hold, and there is a limit to how much information our minds can retain as we move through the world. About archives specifically, I would say:

The moment of record creation (the making of *sources)*	→	No record contains all information about a person/group/event/topic
The moment of record assembly (the making of *archives*)	→	No archive contains all records about a person/group/event/topic
The moment of record retrieval (the making of *narratives*)	→	No story contains all evidence about a person/group/event/topic
The moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history*)	→	No history contains all stories from all perspectives

The creation of a complete archive of all of humanity is not our goal – because it is not possible. Instead, our goal in using Trouillot's framework is to identify and acknowledge where gaps and silences occur in our records and in our work. Once these moments of silence are identified, we can go on to ask:

- What causes these moments of silence to occur?
- What effects do silences or historic gaps have on our archives' users and potential users, on our broader communities, and on the people represented or not represented in these records?
- What, if anything, can we do as archivists to mitigate gaps and silences that may have lasting, harmful effects?

We will address the causes of each of the four silences below, particularly in relation to archival moving image materials. At the end of the chapter, we will consider the effects of archival silences and ways archivists can improve their practice.

THE MOMENT OF RECORD CREATION

Since truly the beginning of cinema, there has been a belief that motion pictures could offer an unmediated view of history. In 1898, the Polish photographer Bolesław Matuszewski wrote a pamphlet called "A New Source of History," where he advocated for the establishment of an historical film archive. His pamphlet included a number of declarations about the cinema as an ideal means of recording history:

- "Animated photography will ... become an agreeable method for studying the past; or rather, since it will give a direct view of the past, it will eliminate, at least on certain points of some importance, the necessity of investigation and study."

- "…<u>The cinematographic print</u>, in which a thousand negatives make up a scene, and which, unrolled between a light source and a white sheet, makes the dead and gone get up and walk, this simple ribbon of imprinted celluloid <u>constitutes not only a historic document, but a piece of history</u>, a history that has not vanished and needs no genie to resuscitate it."

- "Perhaps the cinematograph does not give history in its entirety, but at least what it does deliver is <u>incontestable and of absolute truth</u>... It is ocular evidence that is truthful and infallible par excellence"

So Matuszewski asserts that cinema offers a direct view of history, that watching historic footage is like being a direct witness of a historic moment as it unfolds. Though he admits that the cinematic image may be limited – by the size of the frame or the duration of the film – he argues that what we see on screen is "incontestable and of absolute truth."

What might Matuszewski be missing about the "truth" of cinematic images? Where might there be silences or subjectivities in the photographic record? Some possibilities are listed below:

- **Context –** Like the picture of the "Dog in top hat" above (Figure 3.1), the usefulness of a photographic or cinematic image often relies on our ability to identify it. Who created the image? When, where, and why? Who or what is depicted in the image? Without knowledge of this context, we cannot gather much historical information from a film or image.

- **Manipulated images** – In the 21st century, we are well aware of ways that images can be "photoshopped" or "deep-faked." (In fact, Matuszewski addressed this possibility at the time. Though he admitted that photographs could be easily manipulated, he argued that a reel of film had *too many* frames that were *too small* for anybody to bother to manipulate them.)

- **Framing** – A cinematographer decides what is or is not included in the camera's frame. Not only can important information be excluded from an image, but the framing of the image and the placement of the camera can be used to create misleading perspectives. For example, Harold Lloyd used rear-screen projection to give the illusion of hanging over a city street, while he was really only feet off the ground (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 - Frame from "Safety Last!" (Hal Roach Studios, 1923)

- **Editing** – Also obvious to us now, an editor can cut information out of a film or can put disparate parts together to create new effects. Magician Georges Méliès was already producing trick films and special effects by the time Matuszewski wrote his pamphlet (Figure 3.3).

- **Interpretation** – Last, whatever the content of a film or photograph, different viewers may draw different conclusions about what they see.
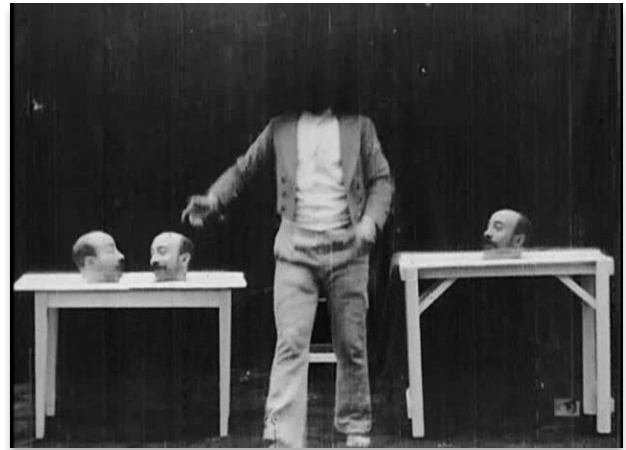

Figure 3.3 – Frame from "Un homme de têtes" (Star Films, 1898)

Clearly there are many reasons that filmic records may contain silences and subjectivities that create gaps in the information provided by film as historic evidence. Additionally, as Caswell notes, not all events and people are ever recorded to begin with. Often, the film and media material available to preserve in an archive are limited to the perspectives of people who have access to recording technologies or who were deemed significant enough to record in the past. In paper records, our archives often lack the perspectives of people who could not read and write or who did not have the institutional power to create official documentation. There are many indigenous cultures with oral traditions that pass cultural information directly among people without creating records that can be accessed outside of those personal contexts.

THE MOMENT OF RECORD ASSEMBLY

The second of Trouillot's four moments of silence is the "moment of record assembly" or "the creation of archives." Importantly, the information that becomes available for researchers to use as evidence depends on what materials and collections are chosen and deposited in an archive. The process of choosing what to keep in an archive is called *appraisal*, addressed in Chapter 4. In general, there are many factors that influence what makes it into an archive, including:

- **Institutional priorities** – In the most straight-forward way, archival institutions decide what material they want to collect. As a result, the material held by an institution often reflects the knowledge, interests, and perspectives of its administration, which may not be inclusive of all perspectives held by users of the archive or communities in the area.

  Ideally, an archive should have a written Collecting Policy that outlines its collecting priorities and transparently explains the process by which collections are evaluated and chosen. Chapter 4 also explains more about how Collecting Policies are developed and what they contain.

- **Physical condition** – Only material that is preserved by its original creators, users, or collectors can be deposited in an archive. As we saw in Chapter 2, moving image film was not treated as worthwhile historical material for many decades. Due to heavy use, nitrate fires, and the general feeling in the industry that film had no value after its point of profitability, up to 70% of our early cinema is believed to be lost.

- **Limited resources** – An archive only has so much physical (or digital) space to store material. Once material is acquired, the work of managing, preserving, and providing access to collections can be expensive and labor-intensive. It is considered unethical archival practice for an institution to take in collections that it does not have the resources to care for and to make available to users. In the end, an archive must choose which collections it will prioritize.

- **Format and technology** – Unlike paper records and photographs, film and media material is technologically dependent. An archive must have the appropriate equipment to project a film or play a tape recording, and it is not easy to find and keep outdated media equipment in working condition. As a result, many smaller archives do not have the technological capacity to take in more obscure media formats, like the 2" videotape reels that were used for professional television broadcasts. There are even many formats of digital media that are no longer readable on modern machines without specialized software or hardware. This technology gap limits an archive's ability to take in more complex film and media collections.

- **Donor relationships** – Most archival material is donated to archives directly from the original creators or collectors. Donors choose to deposit their collections in repositories they trust to preserve their material well and to represent their histories accurately and respectfully. People from historically underrepresented groups – especially those who have experienced systemic exclusion, mistreatment, or surveillance from major state institutions – may be reluctant to entrust their personal and cultural heritage material to archives within the same institutional systems. It is the responsibility of the archival institution to build and maintain relationships of trust with donors, potential donors, and community members.

THE MOMENT OF RECORD RETRIEVAL

Trouillot describes the third moment of silence as "the moment of record retrieval" or "the making of narratives." Though much of the work and decision-making within this moment is done by individual researchers, there are many circumstances that influence who is able to access archival material to begin with:

- **Institutional barriers** – Though most archives today are fully open to public users, some archives still require users to have advanced academic degrees or official government or legal credentials

- **Material barriers** – Though material is increasingly available online as digital collections, the vast majority of records have not yet been digitized and can only be accessed by visiting the archives.

Many archives' Reading Rooms are only open during limited weekday business hours, when a lot of people are at work.

- **Financial barriers** – Research trips to relevant archives may require transportation or even extended travel funding. For media material, archives may charge patrons for the cost of digitization or the creation of access copies. Archives may charge additional fees to license media material or photographs for publication or re-use.

- **Psychological barriers** – Many archives are located within academic or government institutions in major cities, and collection material is often only accessible within supervised Reading Rooms. These conditions can be overwhelming and intimidating to new users, especially to those who have experienced institutional exclusion or surveillance.

- **Knowledge barriers** – Conducting archival research is a specialized skill that requires a fair amount of knowledge about the ways archival materials are collected, arranged, and described. It can be difficult for any new user to understand how to identify and navigate material within archival collections. The description decisions made by archivists and their implications on the research process are discussed more in Chapter 7.

On the part of the researcher, there are subjective judgments and decisions made in the work of:

- Interpretation of records as evidence
- Synthesis of evidence into historical arguments/stories
- Dissemination of arguments/stories to an audience

Obviously, different researchers may interpret and use the same record differently. This could reflect their personal values and biases, but is also influenced by their background knowledge and their field of research. Remember the "Dog in top hat" image in Figure 3.1. A fashion historian may note the particular fabric of the dog's clothing, while a historian of photographic technology may note something about the focus or quality of the image. A social historian may leverage the photograph to discuss the position of dogs in Victorian society. Researchers choose which pieces of evidence to use to make their arguments or to tell their stories. This does not necessarily mean that other evidence is suppressed or ignored. The nature of knowledge and information is such that no single story can represent all evidence from all perspectives.

Finally, the "making of narratives" depends on a researcher's ability to disseminate their historical arguments or stories to an audience. An individual may choose to present their narrative as an academic article or conference presentation, a documentary film, a museum exhibit, a creative performance, or a work of visual art. The researcher or artist may choose the audience for their narrative, often depending on their intended outcome: to reveal underrepresented histories, to celebrate historical individuals or events, to inspire political or social action, etc. At the same time, there can be continued institutional, material, and financial barriers that limit who has access to public platforms or resources for dissemination, which can influence what narratives are heard.

Case study: Conducting archival research

Archival researchers are only able to study material that was created, preserved, and made accessible for use. This poses a particular issue for historians of early film and media, because so many live radio and television broadcasts were never recorded, and so much early nitrate film has been lost. Sometimes the work of conducting archival research involves developing informed hypotheses from limited scraps of evidence or extrapolating from indirect data. The case study below presents one example of using indirect archival evidence to make a historical argument.

In his 1995 article, "Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors" (Cinema Journal 34.3), film historian Ben Singer set up to determine:
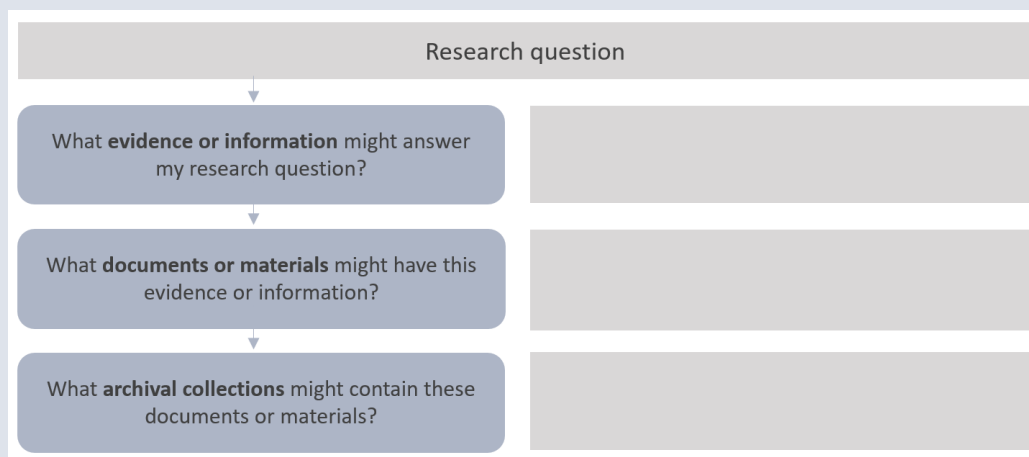
> What was the make-up of the nickelodeon's audience
> in terms of class and ethnic composition?

Nickelodeons were the first dedicated motion picture theaters, which usually operated in converted storefronts and played repeating programs of short films throughout the day. The nickelodeon industry developed quickly and somewhat spontaneously around 1905, and it only lasted until about 1915, as the rise of feature-length films necessitated larger, more comfortable cinema spaces.

Figure 3.4 - Comet Theatre, 100 3rd Avenue, New York City (ca. 1915)

In the absence of original demographic surveys that identified the class and ethnicity of nickelodeon audiences, Ben Singer had to search for indirect data to address his research question. His project followed one common model for conducting archival research:

| Research question	
What **evidence or information** might answer my research question?	
What **documents or materials** might have this evidence or information?	
What **archival collections** might contain these documents or materials?	

First, consider the type of information or evidence that might offer insight into your research question. Next, consider what types of documents might provide that information or evidence. Business ledgers? Magazine articles? Oral history interviews? Finally, consider what archival collections or repositories might contain these documents or materials.
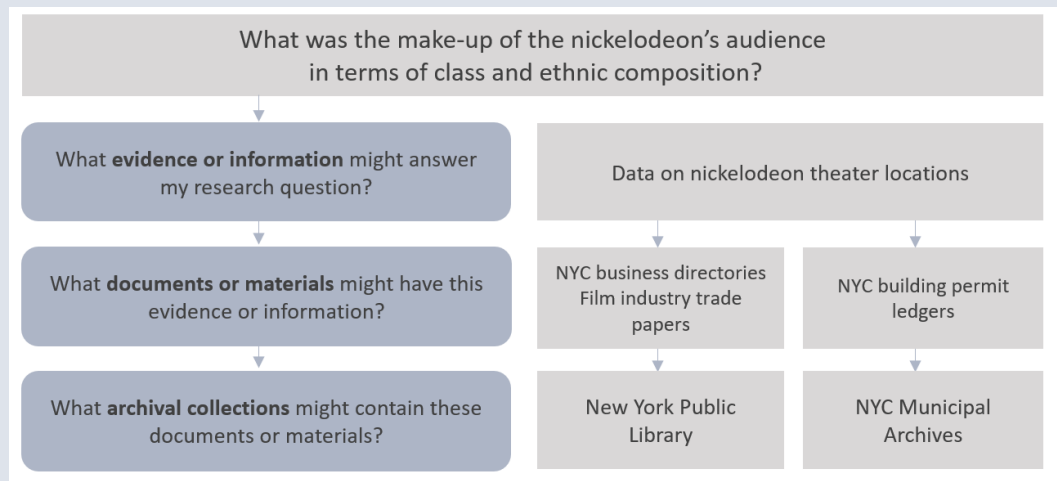
Ben Singer hypothesized that, because New York City neighborhoods in the period were highly segregated by class and ethnicity, he could search for data on the locations of nickelodeon theaters in Manhattan. By mapping these theater locations against known demographics of people who lived and worked in different neighborhoods, he could make an informed assumption about the demographics of people who attended those theaters.
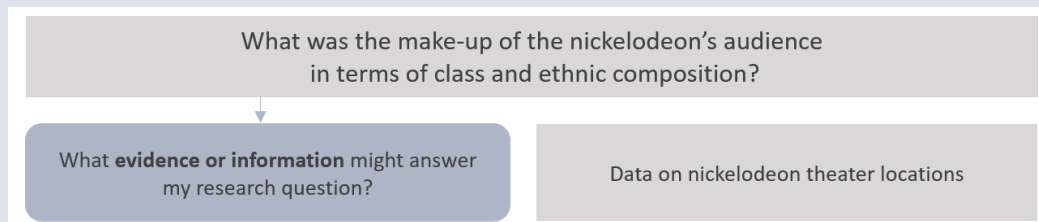
To gather data about nickelodeon theater locations, Ben Singer first searched in New York City business directories and film industry trade papers, which he accessed in the archives of the New York Public Library.
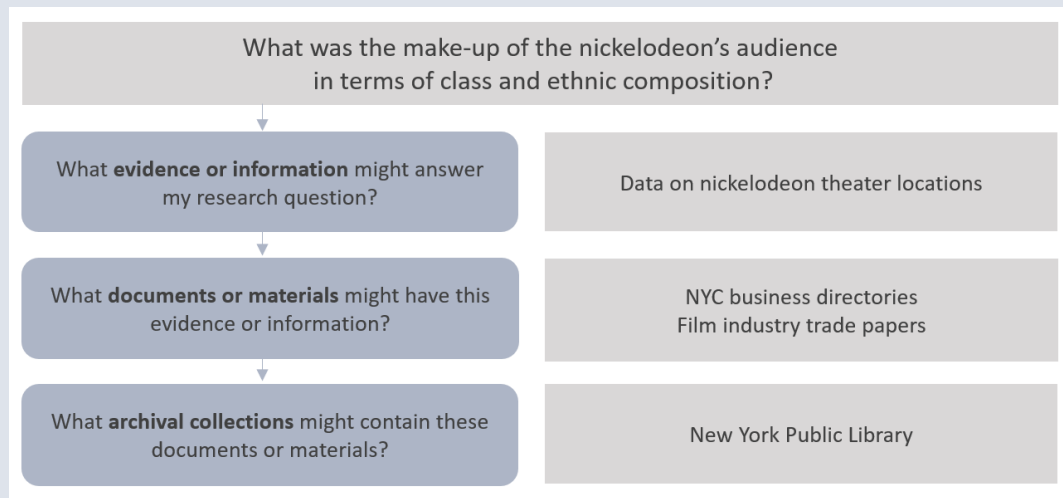
However, because the film distribution and exhibition industries were just developing, there was not comprehensive information available in business directories and trade papers. To find more data on nickelodeon theater locations, Ben Singer decided to access New York City building permit ledgers in the New York Municipal Archives. Because nitrate film was extremely flammable, nickelodeon storefront theaters had to be specifically permitted to exhibit film prints. Ben Singer found that these municipal building ledgers provided more information about where permits for film exhibition had been issued.

What was the make-up of the nickelodeon's audience in terms of class and ethnic composition?	
What **evidence or information** might answer my research question?	Data on nickelodeon theater locations
What **documents or materials** might have this evidence or information?	NYC business directories / Film industry trade papers · NYC building permit ledgers
What **archival collections** might contain these documents or materials?	New York Public Library · NYC Municipal Archives

By mapping nickelodeon theater locations against known neighborhood demographic data, Ben Singer was able to make new inferences about the class and ethnic composition of early cinema audiences in New York City. His project is a strong example of the ways that archival researchers must sometimes seek out indirect sets of data when there may not be direct evidence to address their research questions.

THE MOMENT OF RETROSPECTIVE SIGNIFICANCE

The last moment of silence that Trouillot addresses in the production of historical knowledge is the "moment of retrospective significance" or "the making of history." From all the stories or historical arguments written or disseminated by individual artists and scholars, only a small number get written into textbooks or taken up by institutions and the general public as authoritative and generally agreed-upon understandings of historical truth. These dominant historical narratives are the things made into statues and monuments, the things depicted in major motion pictures, and the things presented by docents and reenactors at national historical sites. The people who decide what our dominant narratives will be are often people who have the political and financial power to design curriculum for schools and colleges, to fund construction of memorials and major museum exhibits, and to influence programming of major films, television shows, and podcasts.

In order to accurately evaluate dominant historical narratives, we need to understand where and why silences and gaps occur in the processes of record creation and record assembly. When we can see how and why certain narratives emerge in common discourse, we may more effectively trace back and analyze the subjective interpretations of evidence that were made to produce them. Of course, this does not mean that dominant understandings of history are necessarily incorrect or malicious. However, because all histories are inherently limited in scope and perspective, it is important to consider what perspectives may be excluded, to determine whether or how our collective understanding of history may be more accurate or better informed.

Why is it important to understand and address silences and subjectivities in our archival records and dominant historical narratives?

Justice and Accountability

As we saw in Chapter 2, the concept of accountability was one of the establishing values of modern archivism, as liberal democracy relies on government transparency and ability of citizens to access government records and information. In our contemporary culture, there are innumerable examples of the ways social media video and police bodycam footage are collected and dissected by law enforcement, judges, the media, and the public to establish narratives around contentious events like the January 6, 2021 attack at the United States capitol. Access to authentic and comprehensive documentation about the past – even the recent past – is vital for processes of justice and accountability on all levels.

As an example, the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries holds a number of collections related to Rocky Flats, a nuclear weapons manufacturing plant near Denver, Colorado, which operated from the 1950s to the 1990s. Material in those collections is often accessed and used by advocates for former Rocky Flats workers and people who lived in neighboring areas, as lawsuits continue to be filed related to health effects and environmental contamination from the plant. At the same time, government bodies and related corporate organizations can draw on archival records that document their operations protocols and compliance with health, safety, and environmental regulations.

Representation

Representation is often misunderstood as a superficial concept, where one identity group is substituted for another within the same narrative. In fact, representation is a matter of including alternative narratives in the archival record, from the perspectives of people who are not otherwise represented.

In the 1970s, media theorist George Gerbner coined the term **symbolic annihilation.** Scholars Robin Coleman and Emily Chivers Yochim explain symbolic annihilation by saying, "poor media treatment can contribute to social disempowerment [because] symbolic absence in media can erase groups and individuals from public consciousness." The same can occur when certain identity groups are excluded from archival records and dominant historical narratives.

Despite the limitations of archives discussed in this chapter, archives are often looked on by the public as authoritative and definitive representations of our history and culture. If archives do not collect evidence of, for example, queer and transgender stories from the past, it may be easy for opponents of gender equality to assert that queer and transgender people did not *exist* in the past. It may be easy to assume that gender nonconformity is a new phenomenon, rather than something that has been an authentic element of human experience in different ways throughout history. In this way, the absence of historical

evidence can lead to policy decisions in the present that can have profound consequences for queer and transgender people.

Other recommended resources that expand on the concept of symbolic annihilation as evidenced in archival records include:

- Michelle Caswell's book, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), which discusses the ways records and photographs created by the Khmer Rouge were leveraged to justify violence in the Cambodian genocide

- Gabriel Solis's essay, "Documenting State Violence: (Symbolic) Annihilation and Archives of Survival" (2019), which relates Caswell's work to depictions of people of color in media and popular culture after events like police shootings or criminal trials. Gabriel Solis is the director of Texas After Violence, a community archive and oral history project

Other chapters of this course address ways that archivists can address silences, gaps, and subjectivities in their practice, in effort to create more accurate and inclusive records and to facilitate more equitable access and use of archival material. The last sections of this chapter present alternative models of archivism that address many of the issues discussed above.

COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

In their 2009 article, "Whose memories, whose archives?," archivists Andrew Flinn and his coauthors define community archives as "collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control." In her article on the South Asian American Digital Archive, Michelle Caswell explains, "Community archives are part of larger social and political movements whereby groups who have been ignored, misrepresented, or marginalized by mainstream archival repositories launch their own archival projects as a means of self-representation, identity construction, and empowerment." Examples include the Interference Archive, the Latino GLBT History Project, and the People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland.

In short, community archives are collections created and controlled by communities, usually outside of traditional archival institutions like universities and government bodies. In practice, many community archives develop in collaboration or partnership with major institutions, in order to have access to sustained support and resources. Community archives can address gaps, silences, and subjectivities in the production of historical narratives in many ways:

- **The moment of record creation (the making of sources**): Community archives generally contain records created *by* the people documented, in their own words, and on their own terms.

This is in contrast to institutional archives which often contain records *about* communities from the perspectives of people in power, like government records and anthropological studies.

- **The moment of record assembly (the making of archives):** Community archives give people authority to decide what records about their communities are valuable to preserve. Community archives are often democratically run, even by volunteers, which allows community members to maintain ownership and control over their own cultural material.

- **The moment of record retrieval (the making of stories):** Community archives are often located in or nearby the communities they document, allowing more open access and use. Community archives are more likely to allow users to browse material from the stacks, which is not possible in traditional archival Reading Rooms. Moreover, the products created from archival material is often more flexible and directly engaging than traditional academic articles and exhibits. Community archives are more likely to have performances, public art and mural projects, and more family and community-oriented events.

- **The moment of retrospective significance (the making of history):** The ultimate goal of community archives is to affect or to counter dominant historical narratives by bringing public visibility to underrepresented perspectives and to shape public understanding about their communities.

In 2016, Michelle Caswell conducted a study with Marika Cifor and Mario Ramirez to determine the impact of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), a community-led archive in Philadelphia. They interviewed members of Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan communities in the US about their experiences using the SAADA, and they heard several common responses:

- **Addressing historic gaps** – Before the SAADA, many interviewees felt it was difficult to locate historical information about South Asian American history. Some subjects explained that their experiences in American communities – where a variety of cultures and customs are very present and active – are rarely represented in versions of American history and culture that appear in textbooks and media.

- **Personal connections** – Some interviewees expressed real emotional responses to the archive. For members of South Asian American communities, the SAADA offers more than just underrepresented historical information. The stories in the archive were reflective of their own cultural experiences in very personal ways. One person said, "The value of the archive is profound. And I think that may be true for a lot of people who suddenly are able to discover themselves, existing, being documented."

- **Diverse representation** – Mainstream archives sometimes tend to represent histories of minority communities either through the perspectives of people in power or through celebration of individual "great men." In contrast, the SAADA is able to represent more than limited or stereotypical stories of South Asian immigration. One survey subject explained, "It represents a wide range of religious backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds, regions of origin, times of migration,

reasons for migration." The breadth of the archive's collections allow for the representation of everyday experiences of South Asian American communities from their own perspectives.

- **Community-building** – As a gathering place for South Asian American community members, the SAADA also hosts events and exhibits for community members related to their own cultural heritage. The more they were able to participate in activities of the archive, the more they felt their histories and perspectives could be understood in broader American narratives.

The authors of the study assert that the SAADA offers to members of South Asian American communities more than representation in the historical record. It offers **representational belonging,** which they describe as "the power and authority to establish and enact their presence in archives in complex, meaningful, and substantive ways." Community archives are not just collections of material that can be accessed and used by members of the communities they represent. Community archives enable groups of people who are historically excluded or misrepresented in mainstream repositories to actively contribute to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of their own historical narratives.

While the term "community archiving" can be useful to identify and describe a distinct model of archiving that centers leadership and participation by members of communities documented in the collections, the term "community archive" has sometimes been used in the field to dismiss or invalidate grassroots organizations as less professional or legitimate than institutional repositories. More often, archivists within institutional repositories have increasingly considered the ways they can incorporate the values and methods of community archiving into their own practices, by forming more collaborative and supportive partnerships with community groups, by consulting with community members about collection development decisions, and by seeking input from members of underrepresented communities about the ways they identify, describe, and understand their own histories and cultural heritage material. One significant model for this type of work is described below.

PROTOCOLS FOR NATIVE AMERICAN ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

In most countries in the Global North, indigenous communities historically have faced symbolic – if not literal – annihilation. In addition to physical genocide and geographic displacement, many indigenous communities in the 19th and 20th century had their children taken away to residential schools, where they were not allowed to use native languages or to learn and practice their own cultural customs. Around the world, the cultural heritage material of indigenous groups has been removed from communities by colonizing forces and held in museums and archives, where it is often misidentified, misunderstood, and mishandled. The legacy of indigenous materials in archives and museums is one of the clearest examples of the ways traditional archivism can cause community members to lose control of their own historical narratives and shared cultural memory.

In response to that legacy, American Indian and other indigenous activists have worked for decades to advocate for the repatriation of cultural heritage material back to tribal communities. In the 1970s, for

example, activist Vine Deloria argued before Congress that withholding from tribal members access to records of their ancestors and their traditional knowledge is a violation of original tribal land treaty rights. In 2006/2007, a group of archivists, historians, and other cultural heritage professionals from fifteen tribal communities came together and drafted the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials. The Protocols have long been considered in the field of archivism to be standard guidelines for the ethical stewardship of material by or about indigenous people – though they were not formally endorsed by the Society of American Archivists until 2018. Often oriented toward major institutional archives, the Protocols include recommendations for many aspects of archival practice, including:

- **Consultation and concurrence in decisions and policies** – Members of tribal communities represented in archival collections should be consulted by archives administration about decisions and policies for the acquisition, handling, and use of archival material related to their own cultural heritage, for reasons discussed below.

- **Understanding Native American values and perspectives –** The fundamental concepts of knowledge, information, and ownership can differ significantly from one culture to another. For example, in some cultures, the idea of preserving material in an archive separate from the context in which it was meant to be used is antithetical to natural lifecycles of objects. Understanding indigenous knowledge systems can help non-indigenous institutions to develop policies that respect the needs and perspectives of indigenous community members. For more on indigenous ways of knowing, see Indigenous Research and Knowledge in North America (University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, 2022).

- **Rethinking public accessibility and use –** Most archival institutions strive to make their material as openly accessible to as many people as possible. However, open access to Native American materials may violate cultural protocols for information-sharing. In some indigenous cultures, information is only shared with certain groups of people or at specified times. For example, in some communities in the Great Lakes region, some stories are only meant to be told when there is snow on the ground.

  To develop more culturally responsive access policies, a digital archive system called Mukurtu has been in development since 2007 at the Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation at Washington State University. The system allows tribal members to tag certain archival materials with Traditional Knowledge (TK) labels, which indicate their preferred access conditions. For example, there may be some material that should be accessed only by men, women, family members, or tribal community members.

- **Special treatment for culturally sensitive materials –** As some knowledge may be restricted in certain ways, some objects may have specific protocols for handling and use. Archives should consult with tribal community members to identify and understand the ways cultural material should be stored, treated, and used.

- **Culturally responsive context –** Throughout the 19th and 20th century, much Native American material in archives and museums was identified and described from the perspective of non-

indigenous people like anthropologists and historians. As a result, many of our archival objects and collections continue to be misidentified or incorrectly described, even in terms that are offensive and derogatory toward indigenous people. Archives should consult with members of represented communities to understand the context of archival material and to identify and describe material with the vocabulary used within the community.

- **Copying and sharing of certain materials –** Archives traditionally take in and preserve original, authentic material. Some archives even specify that they will not accept copies or duplications of material if the originals exist elsewhere. However, archivists have increasingly accepted what is called the **post-custodial** model of collecting, in which the original creator of a collection maintains physical possession of their material while the archive produces the labor and infrastructure to create a digital collection from the material that allows for public research access and use. In the post-custodial model, the original creator is often closely involved in the process of identifying, describing, and contextualizing their material, in a way that gives them more control over the way their histories are conveyed. Through digitization, an archive may be able to repatriate Native American archival material back to tribal communities, while maintaining surrogate copies in the archive that can continue to be used for research.

While the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials were created specifically for material from and about indigenous communities, their recommendations provide a useful model for archivists to develop more ethical and inclusive archival practice for all collections. Archivists can begin to address the gaps in our historical records by forming respectful, reciprocal relationships with members of historically excluded or underrepresented groups, to facilitate the creation, collection, and preservation of more authentic, inclusive, and accurate heritage materials, from the perspectives of people represented in them.

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