
We Need These Bodies, But Not Their Knowledge: Black Women in the Archival Science Professions and Their Connection to the Archives of Enslaved Black Women in the French Antilles

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ABSTRACT

Despite calls for diversity and minority participation in library and information science (LIS) and archival science, these professions have seen little change in this respect over the past two decades. This paper attempts to connect the archived, enslaved black woman of the French Antilles to the contemporary black woman in the United States. The paucity of archival materials on the first group is reflective of the low incidence of the second group in today's archives profession. That is, the way in which black women of the Americas have been historically misrepresented or not represented at all can be connected to recruitment and retention problems in the archival profession. If black women are not recognized as worthwhile subjects in the archives, and presently not valued as knowers, how can they be accepted as library and archive professionals? If the archives are where origin stories are excavated, black women—through the profession of archival science—have a role to play in the administration and management of archival materials concerning the historical enslavement of black women. The paper will specifically discuss concepts from archival appraisal theory and highlight the ways in which power influences the collection of archival materials. Also, educational and training solutions that include black feminist thought, critical race theory, and cognitive justice are discussed.

"What can a niggerwoman do but endure? What can me do but tell the story?

Who is there when we recall great womens?"

—Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women*

According to the American Library Association's (ALA) 2007 *Diversity Counts* report and the HistoryMakers' (2013) "Education: Assessment of Need"

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in archives initiative, although diversity programs have been going on for over twenty years, deliberate exclusion persists (see also Honma, 2005, pp. 14–15). The ALA and the Society of American Archivists (SAA) have launched programs such as Spectrum Scholars and Mosaic, respectively, to support minority recruitment into, and retention within, the archives and library and information science (LIS) professions. Focus on recruitment and retention strategies often conceal problems with hiring practices and work conditions. For the sake of brevity, this paper will focus on the archival science profession, although similar problems exist in LIS. Arguably, if in the future black women in the Americas are placed in positions to manage archives—collections on black women specifically—this will be transformational for both the profession and the women involved.

The location of the archival repositories that house collections relating to enslaved black women in the French Antilles, how they are organized, and how accessible they are to researchers, scholars, and the public tell a story about the state of black archivists in the archives profession. The relationship that black women have to the archives in which they are treated as subjects make black women archivists a unique, if rare group. Because of the paucity of archival materials that represent the lived experiences of black women and of the small number of black women in the archives profession, black women's lives in the French Antilles are largely misrepresented and marginalized. When Europe was colonizing the northern hemisphere, England, France, and Spain divided the islands of the Caribbean among them.

The French Antilles, or French West Indies, is a group of seven French island territories. The two most populous of the seven territories, Guadeloupe and Martinique, are France's main overseas departments; they have the same political organization and are under the same law as France. The French national archives, Archives Nationales, is located in Paris. This archives contains pre-Revolution records important to the French nation-state. All archival materials on French overseas departments and former colonies have now been moved to a suburb of Paris, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine. The traces of enslaved black women in the French historical record have thus literally been pushed out to the periphery, symbolically reflecting how this group is regarded both inside and outside the archives. And this relocation makes it more challenging for researchers to access these materials.

In "Constructing Black Women's Historical Knowledge," Canadian historian Afua Cooper (2000) describes an experience she had with a librarian while seeking out a specific document. She approached the librarian with a reference number for a specific document, but the librarian was resistant. The librarian told Cooper that they did not have much on the topic. Had it not been for the reference number, Cooper would have walked out of the library without the resource. She says that "when one is told by a

librarian, archivist, professor, however well-meaning, that there isn't much on the topic, that is a way of simply denying and erasing a particular past" (p. 45). The librarian had an ethical duty to provide access to the information Cooper sought, and without the latter's insistence that the document was in the collection, she may well have walked away without it. Cooper's experience is that of countless black scholars and patrons. In the U.S. context, Poole (2014) describes the experiences of many black scholars in the Jim Crow South. Black scholars were often denied entry to libraries or else subject to esoteric rules. Sources were found "scattered . . . and black scholars faced the vandalism and even the disappearance of sources" (p. 28). Contained within the experiences of Cooper and countless other black scholars and patrons is the narrative of deliberate obstruction and lack of care for these materials. Herein lies the argument for black persons to manage collections in which they are subjects.

Primary source materials on Africans of the diaspora were often neglected or destroyed. The literature emphasizes historians' and archivists' readings of official documents as "against the grain"—that is, reading through the silences in a document or image to construct a narrative. Hartman (2008) calls this narrative construction "critical fabulation" (pp. 7–8): "By flattening the levels of narrative discourse and confusing narrator and speakers, I hoped to illuminate the contested character of history, narrative, event, and fact to topple the hierarchy of discourse" (p. 12). Because the archives degrade the enslaved, Hartman reconfigures the narrative of two young, enslaved black women murdered on a ship. In "Venus in Two Acts," she states that "by playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account" (p. 11). In other words, Hartman no longer wants to narrate the death of enslaved black women that exist in the archives—in essence, she is defiantly speaking back to the creators of those records. With her counternarrative, Hartman challenges the victim-and-death narrative that populates the archives on this group. Similarly, McKittrick (2014) sees the archives of enslaved black people as "the mathematics of the unliving, the certification of unfreedom" (p. 19). The archives of enslaved black people are a collection of bodies as numbers, violence, and death. As a result, black women as archivists would be speaking back, or resisting, the official narrative and taking part in shaping their own identities.

According to critical race theorist and law professor Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), black women live at the intersection of race and gender (other black feminist theorists have added class and sexuality to Crenshaw's concept of *intersectionality*). Intersectionality is expressed when a black woman experiences gender, race, and class oppression singularly, or simultaneously, without being able to decipher which identity is being oppressed;

that is, all of these identities are functioning in the lives of black women, and they are not able to place one identity over another. In her article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," Crenshaw states that "the intersection of racism and sexism factors into black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately" (p. 1244). Black women have been marginalized globally since chattel slavery; enslaved black women and men were violently forced into a free labor system and social and corporeal death. However, black women had the added burden of sexual coercion—from both black and white men—and controlled fertility. The narrative of the official archives, along with its silences, therein shaped black women's identities and continue to impact their social, economic, and political lives.

This paper provides an overview of archival approaches in Europe and the United States. By no means does it include all of the important voices in the history of archival science; the focus here is on major paradigm shifts in the profession. Being the most current paradigm shift, there is a section on the underrepresented in the archives. I then discuss the power of archival appraisal and use French archival organization to highlight what can be interpreted as Western approaches to their underrepresented archival collections. Last, there is a discussion on theoretical frameworks that could be incorporated into archival science and LIS training programs. These frameworks would introduce preprofessionals to more inclusive concepts. Archival appraisal is the beginning of historiography, and also the beginning of identity-formation for subjects of the archives. Black women have rarely been involved at this important stage of selection—where identities are formed. As a result, it is important that black women be instrumental in the administration and management of primary sources in which they are central subjects.

OVERVIEW OF ARCHIVAL APPROACHES

Archival appraisal is central to the archivist's work. Some scholars in the field believe that it is *the* work of archivists (Cook, 2010, p. 175; Dunbar, 2006, p. 116). Appraisal comes before all other actions in the archives. In *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory*, Ridener (2009) states that "the assignation of value, including evidentiary, juridical, and cultural, is conferred upon records during the process of appraisal" (p. 3); that is, archivists are the gatekeepers of archives, deciding what is valuable, what to keep, and what to destroy. That said, the histories of archival science—hence archival theory and appraisal—is somewhat fragmented.

Ancient Greece had archival repositories, as did the Roman Empire, which is where the story of archival theory and appraisal began (Duchein, 1992, p. 15; Duranti, 1994, p. 331). Archival theory and appraisal are based

in Roman law; specifically, there are two principles from Roman law that have endured: “the concepts of perpetual memory and public faith” (Duranti, p. 331). As a result, the Romans were compelled to develop a way to codify certain processes (usually juridical in nature) that once documented, were unimpeachable: “Because only the present can be known, a device was necessary to freeze the fact occurring in the present before it slipped into the past, and the document, as embodiment of the fact, had the function of converting the present into the permanent” (p. 331). Basically, the Romans believed that once a process was documented, it was fixed, and the fixed or legal nature of a document meant that it was reliable, which would then maintain public faith.

From here, the sources were inconsistent, but I will attempt to construct a concise history of archival science because it is germane to the argument that shapes this paper. Any work that could be defined as *archival science* began in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Europe with the Germans, French, English, and Spanish. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries brought the first working repositories, and in 1307 “the French *Tresor des Chartes* had its first archivist, Pierre, d’Etampes” (Ducheyn, 1992, p. 15). Although the beginning of archival science can be attributed to the European countries mentioned, many of the sources credit France as being essential to the development of it. During the creation of archives across Europe, war broke out. Many repositories and the records therein were destroyed, so this was an obvious setback to the development of archives. Before the Revolution in France, the country had been at the vanguard of archival science, but the archives held public-debt records, which was one of many motives that incited the Revolution. After it, Napoleon Bonaparte began to reconstruct the archives as an ode to the accomplishments of the his empire. The upheaval of the ensuing Napoleonic Wars changed the internal structure of archival repositories in other European countries, creating a new role for archived materials as historical documentation. In fact, one can look to all European monarchies as a new beginning for archival repositories in earnest (p. 17).

By the nineteenth century there had been tremendous progress in archival science as a profession. Samuel Muller, Johan Feith, and Robert Fruin of the Netherlands created the *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, or *The Dutch Manual*, in 1898. According to Ridener (2009), in the archives profession, *The Dutch Manual* is considered the source from which archival theory in North America and beyond originated (p. 21). He explains that the manual emphasized “concepts like original order (maintaining a [respect des] fonds as it was originally used when the records were active) and respecting records creators as the authoritative voice in terms of record organization were brought together and published in the first widely recognized treatise on archival theory”

(p. 21). The manual was the first of its kind to document the concepts of standardization, consolidation, and organization in archives.

In 1922, British archivist and theorist Sir Hilary Jenkinson published *A Manual of Archive Administration*. According to Ridener (2009), Jenkinson's *Manual* was the first to contain practical and theoretical approaches to archives; that is, "Jenkinson's *Manual* is indeed one of the first comprehensive statements of archival theory, one that explicitly separates theory from practice, and makes recommendations regarding a theoretical approach to archives" (p. 41). As Ridener's history explains the significance of Jenkinson's work, it is with his *Manual* that current arguments about the importance of the act of appraisal originate. Jenkinson believed that appraisal was an objective process; in other words, he did not believe that archivists had any power in shaping archives—hence, the future. Jenkinson viewed archivists as mere clerical workers. Granted, the first archivists were clerks, not librarians; rather, they were "clerks of the chancery, clerks of judicial courts, clerks of municipalities, notaries, and the like. They received some practical training in reading old scripts and understanding old documents, but they were not historians" (Duchemin, 1992, p. 20). The archivist as clerk was many years before Jenkinson's time, but he was obviously influenced by this tradition. As clerks, the nature of an archivist's work meant that it was impossible for her or him to be subjective. Duranti (1994), an archivist theorist in the Jenkinsonian tradition, argues that

archival theory posits that an archives is the whole of the documents made or received in the course of purposeful activity, and of the relationships among those documents. The circumstances of creation endow archives with certain innate characteristics, which must be maintained intact for the archives to preserve their probatory capacity. Finally, archival theory posits that it is the primary function of the archivist to maintain unbroken, continuing custody of societal archives, and to protect their integrity by keeping them physically and intellectually uncorrupted. (p. 343)

However, by the twentieth century the archivist was no longer simply a clerk: archivists had been attributing value to records, manuscripts and documents, and had been selecting them for some time. Archivist, educator, and former chair of the Society of American Archivists Richard Cox (2002) explains that by the mid-twentieth century, "archivists already knew of both the power and subjectivity of collecting and appraising (terms often used interchangeably), then disguised in an array of jargon and approaches constituting archival appraisal as something more scientific" (p. 288). In other words, Jenkinson's *Manual* and Duranti's (1994) ideal mask the true nature of an archivist's work; archivists possess, and have always possessed, the power to shape archives.

It was not until around the 1930s that archival science in the United States became distinct from European archival science. During the late nineteenth century, European archival organization split in two. Germany and central Europe used the *registratur*, which meant that each document was numbered—"registered"—and placed into an existing system called Aktenplan. In contrast, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Spain used the non-*registratur* system, which meant that documents were arranged and classified after receipt by the archivist (Duchein, 1992, p. 19). Basically, countries using the *registratur* system would not understand the non-*registratur* system. Today, there is still no uniform archival body for Europe; there are no cross-national standards on the Continent, although they do host archives conferences, the Stage Technique Internationale d'Archives hosted by the Archives de France being one that is open to Europeans and non-Europeans alike.

In the United States, Theodore Roosevelt Schellenberg introduced an archival manual titled *Modern Archives* in 1956. This "elder statesman of the [U.S.] archival community" was a federal government archivist who led archives into its next paradigm shift (Ridener, 2009, p. 77). Schellenberg worked for the U.S. government during a time in which it experienced a dramatic increase in documents. Throughout his twenty-eight-year tenure, the country struggled with the New Deal, was involved in World War II, and saw the rapid expansion of new technologies that resulted in a deluge of documents. According to Ridener, "Schellenberg faced unprecedented amounts of unsorted documents . . . [he] really had no choice other than to embrace appraisal theories and methodologies that resulted in decreased numbers of records retained in archives" (p. 70). At no other time in history had an archivist managed such a large amount of materials. Schellenberg's appraisal theory maintained two principles. The first concerned records management. An archivist would work with the records manager and records creator in shaping the archives; that is, the records manager would work with the creator on records management, and the archivist's focus was on how the records were to be represented. The second principle, one embraced by France, was decentralization. Since Schellenberg was inundated with documents, the best way to handle this problem was to house an archival system in each department of government; common documents could be copied, and historical documents were so few in number that they could be maintained separately (pp. 86–87). Schellenberg was a major contributor to the archival field; at one time he was the director of the Society of American Archivists, a lecturer, and taught at various universities throughout the country.

Schellenberg also introduced the notion that archives should be open to citizens—not a new idea, as the French introduced it during French Revolution—but in an American context this included a cross-section of

the many different groups that up to that point had been underrepresented in archives. As Ridener writes,

Schellenberg's theories were successful in the wake of not only an increased number of records, but also within the context of broadened social perspectives that expanded the definition of archival value based upon interest and research value. Various groups, including veterans, women, and people of color were beginning to gain more and different power in the United States during the postwar era. (p. 70)

Indeed, this was the beginning of a major shift in the archives' mission that would influence its practitioners across North America. More importantly, it was the beginning of a debate about appraisal and the underrepresented in the archives.

APPRAISAL: HISTORY, POWER, AND EXCLUSION

There is power in the practice of appraisal. As cultural theorists Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida emphasize, power over the archives is control of the narrative (Schwartz & Cook, 2002, p. 4). Narrative- and identity-construction begin with appraisal; hence the reproduction of violence in the archives and LIS professions. In the opinion of Cox (2002, p. 301), "archivists need to understand the limitations and more clearly document the purposes and results of their appraisal process and decisions." Documentation not only leaves behind a trail for future custodians but it also affirms archival ethics—namely, that the documents can be trusted. Cox believes that because archivists have not consistently documented their process of appraisal, this inconsistency leaves a space for a body of literature to arise that is skeptical of the archives. He goes further, stating that "in terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and civil strife, archives become assignments for destruction. In times of social tensions, archives become contested and confusing symbols because they are seen to represent authority and power" (p. 290). Thus archivists need to explore the reasons why the act of appraisal is bound up with authority and power.

Cox explores the literature of museum practice to expose some of the mystery surrounding archival appraisal. He suggests that archivists look to museum literature to reduce the arcane culture that surrounds the appraisal process; that is, in much museum literature, the selection process is openly discussed. In the same way that archivists refer to their collection policies or mission statements in dealing with patrons, they must also make an effort to document their appraisal processes. More importantly, when archivists have selected a record or manuscript for the archives, it transforms the item, endowing it with prestige (p. 302). And it has been the white gaze that has had the power to privilege one record or manuscript over another. As Cole (1985, p. xiii) argued, "When Western ethnologists and collectors enter, the objects move into another orbit of value,

one determined by Europeans. In this orbit they have a different value, higher in monetary terms than the one they are given in their indigenous sphere" (p. 309), which is to say that records, historical or otherwise, have no value unless they come under the gaze and management of the dominant culture. At the point of appraisal—*surveying*—there is a repetition of the violence experienced by black subjects of the archives. Ravenscroft (2007) analyzes the white gaze by stating: "Looking . . . is what subjects do, which is to say it is a defining right of whites . . . because they assume the 'black' other is unseeing. The 'black' is not another subject . . . and is therefore unable to return the look" (§3, ¶1). Concerning the suppression of enslaved black women in archives: as a group, they (*we*, in black feminist thought) were not worthy subjects of archives.

Cook (2010) would deconstruct Cox's (2002) recommendation by pointing to the lack of diversity in the field. Because of this lack, there is always a certain amount of warranted distrust. Lecturing in 2010 at the Society of Archivists (UK) conference, Cook reflected: "Look around the conference rooms of every archival conference I've attended in the Anglo-Saxon world for over three decades now, and you see a white, middle-class, well-educated, and not very diverse group—the only significant change in that time is the male-gender demographic domination has been replaced by a female one" (p. 175). As mentioned above, there has only been a one percent growth in diversity in the fields of archives and LIS over the past twenty-two years (ALA, 2007; HistoryMakers, 2013). Perhaps the conversation would never have begun without a desire for new readings of archives from the historian community.

Schwartz and Cook (2002) and Reinhardt (2006) utilize the ideas of Foucault and Derrida by making clear connections among archives, power, and society. For instance, some official sources attribute the end of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery to abolitionists and the people who benefited most from the institution because it was becoming less lucrative. But could it be that the reason it all came to an end is because of an increase in slave revolts? Specifically, in the instance of Saint-Domingue (modern Haiti), the official narrative is usually about the brutality of the slave revolt that led to independence. Simply put, it is about blacks killing whites; it is not about the cruelty, violence, and immorality of chattel slavery that set the stage for revolt. Because slaves of the French Antilles revolted successfully in Haiti, they were denied full citizenship and representation in French nation-state society; Haitians were also punished economically, as France required reparations for the "loss" of free labor. Reinhardt (2006) explains that "Foucault [called] for a writing of history that is not subjugated to authoritative power. . . . Foucault's writing project favors the struggle of these marginal knowledge's against the coercive claims of a 'true' knowledge" (p. 5). In line with many postmodern archivists, Foucault was seeking a complete narrative of society. Schwartz and

Cook (2002) also maintain the notion of a complete narrative recognizing that the objectivity of archivists is a myth, and that archivists have “singularly fallen behind in their theorizing about archives and records, and the power relations embedded in them” (p. 10). In short, the principle of *respect des fonds*—keeping records in the order and condition found—does not exempt the archivists from the power and responsibility of appraisal.

Burton, Ghosh, Sahadeo, Robertson, and Ballantyne (2006) and Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry (2010) are critical of traditional archival practices and narratives. Both Burton et al. (2006) and Chaudhuri et al. (2010) edited essay collections, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* and *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, respectively, that highlight citizens’ interactions with the state and include international subjects from different eras and various ethnic backgrounds. In particular, *Contesting Archives* focuses on women in global archives. Some narratives are more complete than others and some are from official archives, but all narratives are extracted or constructed by what these historians call “reading against the grain” (Chaudhuri et al., 2010, p. xv); that is, many narratives come to the surface only when a citizen has done something considered illegal, or if a citizen was a member of a group under surveillance. Chaudhuri et al. argue that women were not considered worthy subjects to be archived (p. xiv). Therefore it seems obvious that collections of records on enslaved black women were not a priority. However, as the essays in *Archive Stories* show, with a limited amount of archival material there can be a certain amount of “creative invention,” similar to Hartman’s “critical fabulation.” Memory, elements of fiction, and oral histories are the key elements for the construction of counternarratives, which subvert the authority of official archives and give voice to the silences that are often prevalent in official narratives.

THE UNDERREPRESENTED IN ARCHIVES

There has been an explosion of literature during the past decade on underrepresented groups in archives (for example, women, people of color, LGBTQ, and so on). This attention to the underrepresented exposes the latest paradigm shift in archival science and also is in direct opposition to traditional archival principles. Historians, philosophers, and archivists have led this shift, and the central concern is the act of appraisal. Postmodern archival discourse emphasizes the relationship between archives and power, and this discourse often turns to Foucault and Derrida to explain that whoever has control of archives has the power over memory (Reinhardt, 2006; Ridener, 2009; Schwartz & Cook, 2002). Derrida proposes that “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory” (qtd. in Manoff, 2004, p. 9). Essentially, up to this point, archives have been a tool of social control. Foucault’s work mainly focused on people’s relationship to power. In *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation*

in the *French Caribbean*, Reinhardt (2006) interprets Foucault's philosophy when she states that "the memory of a people, according to Foucault, is the key to controlling their dynamism, their experience, and their knowledge of their struggles. In his words, this memory can be reprogrammed to contain a new framework that imposes upon the people an interpretation of the present" (p. 8). When archives ignore or emphasize one narrative over another, it influences how people see themselves and how others see them. When the powerful have control of archives, they can establish narratives of their choosing.

In the 1960s and 1970s, social history became the focus for historians. During these two decades there were many social movements—a global paradigm shift. This signaled a change in the professions of archives and history: archives became interested in collecting records on the underrepresented—sometimes for posterity, at other times for surveillance—and historians were interested in documenting the narratives of groups not represented in the archives of old.

By using Foucault's notion of power and archives, Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar (2007) takes a critical stance about archives and power in his essay "The Panoptical Archive." Similar to anthropologist and Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), Ketelaar explains how power is embedded and organized into archives. According to him, the "physical ordering of archives in the paper world and the logical ordering of digital archives express knowledge-power. Archival institutions, unlike libraries, do not publicly display their holdings to offer a panoptic view to their clients" (p. 147). This is in direct opposition to one of the tenets of archives—that of public access. Perhaps archives are open to the public, but with conditions, one being surveillance. Also, Ketelaar details the ways in which the public, including archivists, is treated when entering an institutional archives: "Researchers . . . are subjected to a host of policing measures. They have to register and sign a statement subjecting them to the rules of the institution; they have to leave their bags and personal belongings behind. . . . They have a legal right to consult public archives, but that right is reconstructed inside the archives into a privilege, the granting of which has to be requested" (p. 147). Black women as a group are already subjected to an inordinate amount of policing and surveillance; it is little wonder why they would not want to move themselves into professions with increased surveillance and gatekeeping.

Some would argue that these measures are part and parcel of having access to archives, but Ketelaar sees any argument as "rationalizations of appropriation and power," and that "rituals, surveillance, and discipline serve to maintain the power of the archives and the archivist" (p. 148). The general code of belief is that the archives is open to the citizen; however, there are many barriers that discourage open access, and this is true of every nation-state's archives. In her paper "The African Slave Trade and

Slavery: Blind Spots in French Thought,” Françoise Verges (2006) emphasizes that there are two types of history. Verges, a political science scholar and president of the Comité pour la Mémoire et l’Histoire de l’Esclavage (Committee for the Memory and History of Slavery) in France, explains that there are two exegeses of history: history constructed through official archives (“claims to have scientific ‘truth’ as its goal and relies on the researcher’s ‘autonomy’”); and there is “the second interpretation of history [that] seeks to understand the conditions of its production, prioritizes reciprocal readings and perspectives, is interested in archives other than the ones stamped ‘official archives’” (§§1–2). Like Chaudhuri et al. (2010, p. xiv) in *Contesting Archives*, Verges reaffirms that it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that archivists, historians, and librarians became interested in those who were not readily visible in archives. And the violence is repeated because the underrepresented are once again only of interest as a repackaged commodity.

ENSLAVED BLACK WOMEN IN THE FRENCH ANTILLES: FRENCH ARCHIVES, FRENCH ATTITUDES

France maintains an administrative presence in several territories of the Caribbean. Today’s French Antilles consists of three main overseas departments (French Guyana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique) located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. Guyana also maintains a Department of Archives, established in 1983 (General Council of Guyana, n.d.). Information on the organization of the Antillean and French archives in English is limited. The organization was interpreted piecemeal through intermediate French reading skills, one print source, and four websites. The Archives de France is organized into three departments: Fontainebleau, Paris, and Pierrefitte-sur-Seine. These archives contain records and materials dating from 625 CE up to the present day (Archives de France, n.d.). There is another archival repository, the Archives nationales d’outre-mer, that contains the records of the French Antilles and other French colonial territories. This archives holds the records from the colonies prior to 1946 (France established a department in Martinique in 1949, and in Guadeloupe in 1951) because the Caribbean and African colonial administrations were not allowed to keep their own records prior to this time (General Council of Guyana, n.d.). According to Caribbean scholar Laurent Dubois (2007), “a large percentage of the documents relating to Guadeloupe are in fact not on the island but in metropolitan France, either in Paris in the National Archives or else in collections of documents that were moved to the ‘Section Outre-Mer’ (Overseas Section) of the National Archives in Aix-en-Provence in the 1980s” (p. 293). Dubois explains that there are microfilms of these records on the island and that the Mormons donated them (p. 293).

The archives (or microfilm of the archives) in Guadeloupe is mostly

made up of administrative papers dealing with the governance of the colonies, consisting of “administrative correspondence, military reports, maps [and] are written from a variety of perspectives—local planters versus metropolitan administrators, military versus civilian officials, and so forth.” The archives contains no documents generated by the majority slave population or the *gens de couleur* (free coloreds) (p. 293). Dubois also conveys that the current archives administration is racially stratified: white French hold management positions in Basse-Terre (the location of archives of Guadeloupe), and black Guadeloupians make up the paraprofessional staff. This example highlights the reproduction of hegemonic systems in the archival profession.

Because of the lack of documentation from slaves, French Antillean writers and historians use fiction to fill in the silences of the archives. In Reinhardt’s (2006) *Claims to Memory*, she discusses her dilemma: how to conduct research without sufficient materials. She says that

by combining factual and fictional traces of the past, I create a cultural space that allows memories of slavery to surface, [and that] it is the dialogue between fact and fiction, between past and present that sheds light on obscured, silenced, forgotten, and even erased fragments of the slave past. It is at the interstices of these documents that memory can be found. Again, the final quest of this study is memory, not the elaboration of a “true” knowledge of the past. (pp. 14–15)

Essentially, a true slave archives can only be constructed through memory.

Orality has been a traditional part of African culture for countless centuries; it is not unusual for the narratives of black folk to be entangled with elements of fiction. So if it must be that the stories of enslaved black women be told in different ways without archives, then so be it. Dubois (2007, p. 299) concludes: “The archive of slavery, then—brought into the present through the intertwined work of novelists, historians, cultural administrators, and musical groups—continues to be used as a tool, and sometimes a weapon, in the debates and confrontations over the future of the French Caribbean.” Indeed, the “master’s tools” cannot be used to correct the errors of the past (Lorde, 2007, pp. 110–114).

Findings

Reinhardt (2006) found, as did I, that the information about enslaved Africans was very limited. Narrowing the search for information about enslaved black women in particular further decreased the potential amount of information available. Reinhardt acknowledged that

the rare testimonies by slaves and emancipated slaves of the French Caribbean are the main barrier for my own work. While there are a relative abundance of narratives by North American and to some extent also English Caribbean slaves, relatively few such written traces have been left in Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. This lack

of sources made my original aim of exclusively representing the slaves' viewpoint simply unfeasible. (pp. 14–15)

The paucity of archival material on enslaved Africans forces historians to employ elements of fiction in the completion of narratives. In fact, the use of fiction has become standard in the narratives of this group. Consequently, any archival discussion on enslaved black women in the French Antilles would have to be done with a synthesis of voices. Together, the state of archives on enslaved black women and the current data on the recruitment of underrepresented groups in the archives and LIS professions demand the incorporation of concepts from black feminist thought, critical race theory, and cognitive justice into archival science and LIS curriculums. These frameworks will introduce future archivists and librarians to inclusive concepts and practices—practices that not only increase bodies but also create a cosmos of knowledge.

ARCHIVAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Black Feminist Thought

As previously mentioned, archival appraisal theory is rooted in Roman law (Duranti, 1994). An archives reflects what an organization or nation deems important for the future. As black women have historically occupied the lower ranks of society, it is not surprising that archives contain little information on enslaved black women, specifically in the French Antilles. Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains that black women have had their voices suppressed to preserve social hierarchies: “Maintaining the invisibility of black women and our ideas not only in the United States, but in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, and other places where black women now live, has been critical in maintaining social inequalities” (p. 3). Because of this suppression of black women’s voices—in archives specifically—historians, archivists, and writers have had to use a combination of quantitative data, oral histories, and slave narratives to construct narratives about enslaved black women (Bush-Slimani, 1993; Eltis, Lewis, & Richardson, 2005; Engerman, 1976; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Moitt, 2001; Reddock, 1985; Stein, 1978; Tadman, 2000). Also, the silencing of black women has allowed those who control archives—archivists included—to shape and control their identities. These identities are what Collins (2000) calls “controlling images”; as a form of social and political control, “portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mamas has been essential to the political economy of domination fostering black women’s oppression” (p. 67). These controlling images act as an obstruction blocking the view to black women’s humanity. One of the tenets of black feminist theory is *inclusivity*, and it is not an inclusivity that is about

simply collecting and placing bodies, as diversity-recruitment campaigns often are. Black feminist inclusivity is about sharing power with all those who are oppressed and allowing space for different knowledges.

Critical Race Theory

Dunbar (2006) uses critical race theory as a framework to discuss issues of the underrepresented in archives. According to him, this theory, originally called critical legal studies, emerged from 1970s liberal civil rights discourse in the legal community. Critical race theory “critiques issues related to race that are based on what is normative, as well as offering an alternative to what is normative” (p. 112). In his discussion, Dunbar attempts to subvert the normativeness of the narratives produced by archives. He uses the concepts of *counternarratives*, *microaggressions*, and *social justice* as lenses through which to discuss archival training. Counternarratives are relevant to this paper because of the limited amount of archival materials on enslaved black women. It is often from a single name and brief description from a ledger (for example, “Marie-Claire, mulatto, 16 years old”) that a narrative is constructed. Dunbar explains that “storytelling [is] an established qualitative method within the social sciences” and used “to construct alternative realities to those constructed through social institutions of dominant culture” (p. 114). And since some argue that history as told from official archives is problematic, that it is a partial construction, the use of counter-narratives to fill the silences is a valuable tool; the counternarrative, in some ways, levels the playing field. There are two types of counternarrative: one that enriches the stories of the dominant culture, and another that is antagonistic. Dunbar also adds that nongovernmental institutions can be a source for counternarratives (p. 115).

Dunbar also uses the concept of *micro-aggression* to critique appraisal theory. Microaggression is “defined as subtle forms or expressions of racism or bias.” These subtle forms of bias can be intentional or not. Microaggression materializes “at the point of appraisal [when] future archival holdings are first assigned a socio-historical and socio-cultural value that is subsequently articulated and reified through description” (p. 116). Basically, descriptive schemes that have biases built into them and have been in force for many years influence how documents are described and organized. Micro-aggressions are also experienced in real time by black people and other underrepresented groups and can be one of many factors that impact recruitment and retention in the archives and LIS professions.

Dunbar’s solution is to employ a social justice framework in archival science education. *Social justice* is a concept that is best implemented through education. He outlines the four goals that are germane to archival discourse:

- To provide a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is more equitable

- To seek vehicles for actors to express their own agency, reality or, representation
- To develop strategies that broker dialogue between communities with unparalleled cultural viewpoints
- To create frameworks to clearly identify, define, and analyze *oppression* and how it operates at various individual, cultural, and institutional levels (emphasis in original)

In essence, Dunbar offers these concepts and goals to be incorporated into an archival training program in order to effect change in the archival profession.

Cognitive Justice and Epistemic Violence

In addition to the application of concepts from the social justice framework, the inclusion of concepts from the cognitive justice framework into archival science and LIS curriculums holds promise. Similar to Dunbar's discussion on counternarratives, the cognitive justice framework is inclusive of different knowledges or epistemologies. This framework functions at a more granular level than social justice because it includes the study of indigenous knowledge systems and curriculum analysis; that is, it seeks to bring different knowledges into dialogue in the classroom. Brought into archival and LIS curriculums, students are asked to treat different knowledges equally, without placing one above another (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011, p. 46). Students need to be taught that there are different ways of knowing that are equally as valuable as Western thought. In turn, this will dilute the reproduction of Western knowledge systems that then reproduce hegemonic whiteness in the archives and LIS professions (Honma, 2005, p. 14).

Because historically, black women have been pushed to the margins of society, the dominant culture is not accustomed to listening to them, let alone learning from them. Black women are not situated as knowers. This positionality can lead the dominant culture to actively silence black women—a form of epistemic violence. In her article "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," Dotson (2011) acknowledges that because black women belong to an objectified social group they are hindered "from being perceived as knowers" (p. 243). Stereotypes, such as "welfare queen,"¹ interfere with the notion of black women as professionals and scholars. Therefore it is essential that more substantive changes be made at the curriculum and training levels for archivists.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to explore the problems that archives holding collections on enslaved black women of the French Antilles face. Even after the archives have been located, their accessibility and organization both speak to their relative success in limiting research and hence con-

structing counternarratives. Particularly in the context of the Americas, these collections are invaluable to researchers who view black women as important research subjects. Since archives fix acts and identities, connecting the historical to the contemporary highlights the continuum on which the enslaved black woman in archives and the contemporary black woman in the United States exist. The archival science profession seems to be in a precarious position, particularly when it comes to recruitment and retention. To black women in the United States, archives could be interpreted as another way in which the government documents their movements; there are no substantive narratives on black women in the French archives (a rarity across the globe), only quantitative data—data important to economists, who deliver reports to the business establishment and the arbiters of law—“the lists, the ledgers, the commodities of slavery” (McKittrick, 2014, p. 22). In fact, there is only a single scholarly source on enslaved black women in the French Antilles (Moitt, 2001), and a single volume of essays on enslaved black women (Gasper & Hine, 1996). With all of the campaigns for diversity in the field of archives, it is not surprising that the numbers are still abysmally low. This can be attributed to a lack of knowledge of the professions, and also that black women are deliberately excluded because they are not acknowledged as “knowers.” That there is a call for diversity is a good thing, but this campaign started over two decades ago. Archivists Cook (2010) and Ridener (2009) recognize that the archives profession is still culturally homogeneous, the latter stating that “while diversity continues to play a key role in contemporary archives, many of the theorists cited here are white and male” (p. 113). How can archives, which have historically suppressed records, now convince black women to join and stay in the profession? There is ample space for research and case studies on minority recruitment and retention efforts. It would be particularly interesting to study the retention of under-represented professionals that have participated in programs established by the Society of American Archivists.

NOTE

1. “Welfare queen” is a disparaging term often used by conservative politicians, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, to frame black women as parasites on the public welfare system. Although the term is based on a real person—Linda Taylor, who committed welfare fraud—it has become a negative stereotype of black women in the American imagination (Kohler-Hausmann, 2007).

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