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Contemporaneous Collecting: A New Trend in Field Collection

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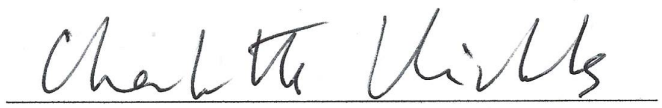
Approved by: 

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Abstract

The collection of contemporary materials has become more common in the museum field since the 1980s. Many institutions in the 21st century acquire contemporary material culture of all kinds, including t-shirts, posters, computers, sports equipment, photographs and other ephemera. Much finds its way into collections through the traditional means of donation and purchase. Museum professionals also engage in fieldwork of sorts, attending events such as rallies, protests, marches, sporting events, the aftermath of natural disasters and other tragedies in order to gather materials onsite, essentially capturing history as it happens. In this paper, the former will be referred to as rapid response collecting, while the latter is contemporaneous collecting. A nationally-distributed survey created by the author seeking both quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates that there are many challenges associated with the practices that prevent many from engaging, including lack of space, staff, time, or connection to an institution's mission. Concurrently, the survey results highlight the benefits related to community engagement experienced by those who do pursue such activity. It is proposed that institutions with relevant missions, including history museums of varying foci, should engage in rapid response and contemporaneous collecting to better preserves contemporary materials for the future and enhance engagement with the public through socially responsive exhibitions and the diversification of representation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Not to rise to this challenge [of collecting contemporary culture] is to convert the museum into a mausoleum, a monument to a past age, completely out of touch with its own time."[1]

Anna Steen, ("Samdok: tools to make the world visible")

Rapid response and contemporaneous collecting have impacted the acquisition methods of museums in the twenty-first century. The practices allow institutions to expand their traditional role as keepers of the past by permitting them to keep pace with the rapidly-changing present. Imagine a visitor walking into a museum and seeing a sign not much different from one she made just a year ago for a Women's March. This visitor would immediately relate to the items on display and therefore have a greater connection with the institution. There are, however, challenges inherent with choosing to acquire such materials. Posters, t-shirts, hats, packaging, brochures: many of these items are considered ephemera, which by definition are not meant to last. So why collect them? Based on the results from my nationally-distributed survey, this thesis proposes that despite its challenges, rapid-response collecting, which includes field collection, should be undertaken by institutions with applicable missions, which typically include different types of history museums. Engaging in such activity better preserves contemporary materials for the future and enhances engagement with the public through socially responsive exhibitions and the diversification of representation.

Both rapid response collecting and contemporaneous collecting are aspects of contemporary collection, however, a distinction needs to be made between them. The former refers to all acquisition of contemporary material whether through donation, purchase, or field collection. Contemporaneous collecting is a type of rapid response collecting but refers specifically to field collection by professionals attending events such as rallies, protests, marches, sporting events, the

[1] Anna Steen, "Samdok: tools to make the world visible," in *Museums and the Future of Collecting, 2nd edition*, ed. Simon J. Knell (New York: Routledge, 2004), 196.

sites of natural disasters, and other tragedies. Neither form of acquisition is new; the former arose in the early twentieth century, and the latter has roots as far back as the early nineteenth century. That being said, contemporaneous collecting did not become common until the 1980s and significantly increased in the early twenty-first century. Although it occurs globally, this paper focuses on institutions in the United States.

Rapid-response collecting and contemporaneous collecting in particular signal two shifts in the museum field. The first concerns the way these materials are brought into the museum. No longer content to wait for donations or for the sale of appropriate materials, some institutions are attempting to acquire history as it happens to better preserve those items and the information associated with them. In the minds of some—including museum professionals—what constitutes "history" has changed. It is no longer based on events that happened a century or even a decade ago; it can be two weeks past. The second shift relates to the types of items being gathered. Historically, institutions often both intentionally and unintentionally told the stories and acquired the objects of the upper classes, in part due to items' relative durability, as noted in later chapters. Rapid-response and contemporaneous collecting provide the opportunity to assist in the process of making museums more reflective of and welcoming to diverse populations.

Much of the literature on the history of collecting considers the motivations of specific individuals and the types of materials they owned. Susan M. Pearce, in *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (1994), describes broad modes of collecting: "'souvenirs,' 'fetish objects,' and 'systematics.'"[2] She describes collections studies as encompassing three primary topics: collecting policies; the history of collecting; the motivations people had for collecting and the types of

[2] Susan M. Pearce, "Collecting Reconsidered," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 193-194.

collections they amassed.[3] Pearce also wrote *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (1995), which focuses on the methods of those currently living in Europe as well as those of European descent outside of Europe, and serves as an "investigation into collecting as a set of things which people do, as an aspect of individual and social practice which is important in public and private life as a means of constructing the way in which we relate to the material world and so build up our own lives."[4] While there is fairly extensive research on the acquisition practices of individuals, a comprehensive history of institutional collecting seems to be lacking.

The study of contemporary collecting specifically has many facets. Some scholars examine the different reasons why museums have turned to it and the methods they use in doing so. In *Contemporary Collecting: Theory and Practice* (2011), Owain Rhys gives an overview of different approaches from the early 1900s to the early 2000s in the United States, United Kingdom and Sweden. His ultimate goal in writing was "to provide a working model for the future of contemporary collecting in Wales based on relevant debates and theories, and on past and current practices…"[5] Although his model focuses on Wales, many of his recommendations are applicable for museums everywhere.

There are also multiple edited compilations of articles focusing specifically on rapid response collecting and the various challenges and opportunities it poses. *Extreme Collecting: Challenging Practices for 21st Century Museums* (2012), edited by Graeme Were and J.C.H. King, arose from workshops held at the British Museum debating the topic. Extreme collecting, by their definition, is "a term used to denote those difficult objects that lie at the fringes of what is normally considered

[3] Ibid, 193-194.
[4] Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 4.
[5] Owain Rhys, *Contemporary Collecting: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Museumsetc, 2011), 11.

acceptable practice in museums."[6] A second compilation of essays, Simon J. Knell's *Museums and the Future of Collecting, 2nd edition* (2004), examines different theoretical and practical aspects of contemporary collecting, including projects undertaken by specific museums; gathering in difficult situations such as wartime and archaeological sites; acquiring popular culture; and collecting from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in museums. Knell also discusses the changing role of objects in the more audience-focused museum.[7]

Some literature explores the benefits and challenges of amassing contemporary materials, regardless of method. In 2004, Anna Steen wrote about Sweden's Samdok network (1973-2011) and whole heartedly supported contemporary collecting. She states that museum professionals who neglect to collect contemporary materials are "underestimating their own competence and the museum's capacity to create new knowledge and denying future historians an invaluable resource. To put it more strongly, they will be betraying their profession."[8] Steen argues that museums should gather contemporary material following the example of Samdok.

There is a significant amount of scholarship on contemporary collecting as a whole, but less has been written generally about field collection, probably due to its relative newness. The writings that do exist, however, are by museum professionals who describe experiences specific to their institutions. Steven Miller, in his article of 1985 entitled "Collecting the Current for History Museums," outlined both the benefits and the challenges of contemporaneously collecting in relation to his experience at the Museum of the City of New York, and gives reasons why materials should be acquired. He cites a few examples, such as influential books, bell-bottom blue jeans, and posters

[6] Graeme Were, "Extreme Collecting: Dealing with Difficult Objects," in *Extreme Collecting: Challenging Practices for 21st Century Museums*, ed. Graeme Were and J.C.H. King (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 4.
[7] Simon Knell, "Altered values: searching for a new collecting" in *Museums and the Future of Collecting, 2nd edition*, ed. Simon J. Knell (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.
[8] Steen, "Samdok: tools to make the world visible," 196.

publicizing local events, and the rationale for taking them.[9] Pamela Schwartz of the Orange County Regional History Center in Orlando has written extensively about her involvement assembling materials following the Pulse Nightclub Massacre in 2016.[10] In 2017, Barbara Cohen-Stratyner developed rules for documenting materials and the events from which they were gathered. Information prepared both beforehand and onsite allows institutions to establish the most complete provenance possible for the object and context about the event.[11] Much has also been written about the individual and combined collecting efforts of museums after the 9/11 attacks in New York City, which will be discussed below in Chapter 2.

This thesis furthers our understanding of the state of rapid response and contemporaneous collecting. As part of my research into the status of the practices in 2019, I compiled a survey and distributed it to museum professionals across the country in order to assess current attitudes towards them and to distinguish trends and methods. I targeted those who work with collections in particular by sending it to the American Alliance of Museum's Collections Stewardship listserv, while also sending it to listservs with broader viewership. This ensured that the experiences of a wide variety of professionals from different types of museums would be included. (See Appendix A for a copy of the full survey). The survey was designed to determine which types of institutions are involved in this type of collecting, the benefits of doing so, and the challenges they have experienced in the process. Questions focus on whether an institution acquires contemporary material culture items, how often they do so, and the approximate numbers of objects in their collection acquired in this way. A distinction was made in the survey between rapid response collecting and contemporaneous collecting to determine if institutions were engaged in one or the other, or even both. Based on the

[9] Steven Miller, "Collecting the Current for History Museums," *Curator* 28, no. 3 (September 1985): 165.
[10] Pamela Schwartz, "Preserving History as it Happens: Why and how the Orange County Regional History Center undertook rapid response collecting after the Pulse nightclub shooting," *Museum* 97, no. 3 (May 2018): 16-19.
[11] Barbara Cohen-Stratyner, "What democracy looks like: crowd-collecting protest materials," *Museums & Social Issues* 12, no. 2 (October 2017): 88-90

findings from the survey, I will suggest ways of making this type of acquisition more accessible to a wider number of institutions.

Chapter 2 gives a brief history of the ways in which museums have historically built their collection and the proliferation of contemporaneous collection in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It also examines the increased acceptance of the study and display of material culture. Chapter 3 focuses on the quantitative data collected in my survey to demonstrate the breadth of the practice in 2019 by exploring which types of institutions are collecting using these methods and what prevents others from doing so. The fourth chapter analyzes the qualitative data gathered in the survey, delving into the criteria used for event and object selection, the kinds of items acquired, and the benefits and challenges of participating in the practice. The fifth chapter provides new recommendations for making contemporaneous collecting more accessible to a greater number of institutions through the development of cross-organizational collaboration and profession-wide policies. It also examines why this is important in the context of the social role of museums in their communities, including how this method of acquiring materials can facilitate a connection with contemporary visitors. Rapid response and contemporaneous collecting present an opportunity for museums with relevant missions to better engage with their communities now and in the future through the telling of more complete and inclusive stories with contemporary materials.

Chapter 2: The History of Institutional Collecting and the Growing Acceptance of Material Culture

Rapid-response and contemporaneous collecting in the twenty-first century need to be understood within the larger context of more traditional collection methods in order to demonstrate the drastic shift that these approaches represents for the field. Museums have always been closely associated with the acquisition and preservation of objects, such as art, artifacts, and samples from the natural world. The act of gathering materials on site at the time they are created dates back to the early nineteenth century, although it was unusual at the time. Contemporary practices differ from those of the past not only in how items are obtained, but also in the type of articles amassed. Rapid-response and contemporaneous collecting often aim for material culture, that is, artifacts or ecofacts that reflect or define "culturally determined behavior" of the era.[12] Types of items can include clothing, tools, pictures, and signs. The focus is both the object itself, but also its cultural context. This chapter presents an overview of the ways in which museums have traditionally built their collections and explores the growing prevalence of acquiring contemporary material culture.

Traditional Collecting Practices

The museums of today stem, in part, from the curiosity cabinets of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, known as Kunst and Wunderkammer. These private collections typically juxtaposed fine art such as painting and sculpture with exotic natural specimens, often in an attempt to create a microcosm of the world. [13] Middle class and princely collectors alike organized their possessions according to categories, but because they typically sought curiosities, or rarities, they were not acquiring materials necessarily representative of the society in which they lived. The idea of

[12] "What is Material Culture?," *National Park Service*, accessed May 3, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/archeology/afori/whisar_matc.htm.
[13] Sharon MacDonald, "Collecting Practices," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 81.

classification is still very important today, though the categorizations used are quite different. The goal of public institutions today is not to create a microcosm, per se, but completeness within a certain category or object type is often taken into consideration. A primary concern for many museums when considering new additions is whether it fills a gap in their holdings.

Amassing a collection has always been a sign of wealth, whether private collectors or princes, and whether Old World or New World. Collecting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries differed from the quest for "curiosities" of the previous century. There were three new approaches to selection: finding objects that tell a story of a particular event or individual; accumulating private property and real estate for its value in the "monetary exchange economy"; and classifying an object "within its place in a systematic order" in nature, especially in relation to natural history items.[14] By 1793, the idea of the public museum had emerged with the founding of the Louvre Museum in Paris. Not only princely collections but also those of private individuals were made accessible to all classes. In the United States, for example, Charles Willson Peale founded the Philadelphia Museum in 1786 after first opening a portrait gallery in his home in 1782.[15] The opening of institutions to the public—specifically those dedicated to fine art—positioned them as educators of the masses.[16] This pattern continued in the twentieth century with The Frick Collection and the Morgan Library and Museum in New York and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, whose collections of "fine art" in the form of paintings, manuscripts, sculpture, and decorative arts housed in or near the collector's own palatial home was considered the epitome of taste and refinement in the grand European tradition.

[14] Pearce, *On Collecting,* 114.
[15] Irwin Richman, "Charles Willson Peale and the Philadelphia Museum," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 29, no. 3 (1962): 257.
[16] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 11.

Not all institutions formed out of personal collections displayed fine art. The Mercer Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, for example, opened in 1916 to showcase what may be defined as material culture, or "the physical manifestations of human endeavor, of minds at work (and play), of social, economic, political processes affecting all of us."[17] The institution displays tools predating the Industrial Revolution that were once in the private collection of archeologist Henry Mercer. Historically, a firm distinction was made between "high" ("elite") culture and material or popular culture. Collections of fine art were in many cases "tied to taste, race, and class," and they became the "foundation of what 'good art' looks like," while items that were more functional were excluded and seen as inferior.[18] This point of view continued through the later twentieth century when Edith Mayo of the National Museum of American History noted in 1981 that preserving popular culture will likely result "in less of an 'elite' collection than exists today in most museums. That will necessarily be the case if we truly wish to preserve that which is most representative of the culture and its value system."[19] Attitudes began to change, however, with exhibitions such as the controversial "High & Low" at New York City's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1990, which sought to demonstrate the relationship between popular culture and painting and sculpture and how modern art and popular culture impact one another.[20] By the early twenty-first century, collecting contemporary materials was more widely recognized as representing an opportunity to develop a fuller picture of present-day society for future generations, not only in the types of objects, but also the stories of their previous owners.

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[17] Helen Sheumaker and Shirley Teresa Wajda, "Introduction," in *Material Culture in America: Understanding Everyday Life,* ed. Helen Sheumaker and Shirley Teresa Wajda (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2007): xxi.
[18] Laura Raicovich, "Museum Resolution: Dismantle the Myth of Neutrality," *Walker,* January 8, 2019, https://walkerart.org/magazine/soundboard-museum-resolutions-laura-raicovich.
[19] Edith Mayo, "Connoisseurship of the Future," in *Twentieth-Century Popular Culture in Museums and Libraries*, ed. Fred E.H. Schroeder (Bowing Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), 15.
[20] Roberta Smith, "Review/Art; High and Low Culture Meet on a One-Way Street," *The New York Times,* October 5, 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/05/arts/review-art-high-and-low-culture-meet-on-a-one-way-street.html.

The Study of Material Culture

Increased scholarly interest in the study of material culture was demonstrated in the 1980s through the founding of the *Winterthur Portfolio,* a publication sponsored by the Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library of American decorative arts as well as through the establishment of graduate programs centered on the topic at the University of Delaware, the University of Notre Dame, and Boston University.[21] However, the acceptance of the study is still not fully embraced. Some historians, for example, still focus on texts as opposed to objects. In 2008, the collection of other forms of ephemera specifically was still questioned by some because of the cost associated with "acquiring, preserving and making accessible ephemera for which there is no demand from a specific academic field."[22] There is, however, a professional organization—The Ephemera Society of America[23]—dedicated to the topic as well as programs, such as the Center for Ephemera Studies at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom.[24]

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) gathered in February 1987 for what was called "The Common Agenda Conference." It brought together staff from history-based institutions across the country to "identify common problems, solutions, and opportunities for collaborative action that would improve the nation's history museums and set new standards for care and interpretation of the nation's artifactual heritage."[25] There were frequent mentions of the collection of contemporary materials, in addition to a few references to contemporaneous collecting.

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[21] Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1.
[22] Georgia B. Barnhill, "Why Not Ephemera? The Emergence of Ephemera in Libraries," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Cultural History* 9, no. 1 (2008): 127.
[23] "The Ephemera Society of America," *The Ephemera Society of America*, accessed March 23, 2019, http://www.ephemerasociety.org/.
[24] "Centre for Ephemera Studies," *University of Reading*, accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.reading.ac.uk/typography/research/typ-researchcentres.aspx.
[25] Lonn W. Taylor, "Introduction," in *A Common Agenda for History Museums: Conference Proceedings, February 19-20, 1987,* ed. Lonn W. Taylor (Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 3.

The introduction to the written record of the conference recognized the increased interest in the academic study of material culture. That being said, as of 1987 when the conference took place, Nicholas Westbrook of the Minnesota Historical Society, author of one of the conference papers, noted that the increased academic interest in the topic had not greatly impacted museum exhibitions or collection research, as the focus remained on written materials as opposed to objects.[26]

The study of material culture not only examines objects as a source of evidence, but also investigates their relationship to those who made and used them. This presents some particular challenges due to certain inherent qualities of "modern material culture," identified by Thomas J. Schlereth: "differences as to material (new synthetics), type (electronic machine-readable data), scale (the artifacts of industrial or commercial archaeology), quantity (due to mass-production and mass-distribution), and function (planned obsolescence and disposable ephemera)."[27] Since the Industrial Revolution began in the mid-eighteenth century, materials have been mass-produced in large quantities, but often lack the durability of pre-modern objects. They can be purposefully ephemeral.

The expansion of material culture collecting in the 1980s thus reflects its acceptance as a valid area of study in the mid to late twentieth century. The term refers not just to objects, but also to the meanings they possess for both individuals and groups based on context.[28] Fine art such as paintings or sculpture was to be valued for its "purely aesthetic and principally visual qualities," while decorative arts, which can be aesthetically pleasing, also have a function, such as furniture or

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[26] Nicholas Westbrook, "Needs and Opportunities: Interpretation and Collections," in *A Common Agenda for History Museums: Conference Proceedings, February 19-20, 1987,* ed. Lonn W. Taylor (Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 21.
[27] Thomas Schlereth, "Defining Collecting Missions: National and Regional Models," *A Common Agenda for History Museums*: *Conference Proceedings, February 19-20, 1987*, ed. Lonn W. Taylor (Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 24.
[28] Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, "Writing Material Culture History," *Writing Material Culture History,* ed. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

ceramics.[29] The field is interdisciplinary and means something slightly different depending on the discipline: "from anthropology it has garnered that material culture 'expresses and mediates human and social relationships, from social history it has inherited an interest in the non-elite, and from art history and the decorative arts, the field has developed close attention to aesthetics."[30] The study is, therefore, closely associated with the study of popular culture, which includes the non-literate. It allows for scholars today to glean information from these materials to learn about their owners based on what was bought, sold, and used.[31]

Museum Collecting and Display of Contemporary Materials

The collecting of present-day ephemera has impacted the methods of acquisition for institutions. This started to occur in the mid- to late-twentieth century as more emphasis was put on gathering current materials; rather than waiting for donors or sellers to approach them with items, museum professionals began attending events such as protests and rallies themselves. It was not an entirely new phenomenon, as the New-York Historical Society had collected materials—specifically those related to the American Revolution—as early as its founding in 1804.[32] The term "contemporary collecting" is, however, itself somewhat problematic. As Owain Rhys notes, there is not a standard, profession-wide definition for what contemporary is.[33] For some it may be anything within the current year and, for others, anything within the past thirty years. This question of definition will be examined in Chapter 4 with regard to survey responses.

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[29] Michael Yonan, "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 2011): 234.
[30] Karen Harvey, "Introduction," *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.
[31] Scholar Henry Glassie noted how all people throughout history use objects, while not all write in Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter," 3.
[32] Jan Seidler Ramirez, "Present Imperfect: The New-York Historical Society's Collecting Odyssey of 9/11/01," *New York Journal of American History* 65, no. 1 (January 2003): 51.
[33] Rhys, *Contemporary Collecting,* 14.

Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore do not address contemporaneous collecting when describing field collection in the 2010 edition of the *Museum Registration Methods,* where I would argue it is most applicable. Field collection, they write, "may be a series of purchases acquired during an expedition."[34] The rest of the definition applies to scientific and archeological specimens. This would seem to leave out contemporaneous collecting of everyday objects or oral histories. Their definition of expedition needs to be clearer, and reference to seeking objects and oral histories should be elaborated on in the "Field Collection" section, or be considered in its own section. As already noted, amassing contemporary materials—and even contemporaneous collecting—are not new practices, which makes their absence from profession-wide codes and best practices troubling.

Purchasing is one of the five primary ways in which materials are acquired by museums today (the others being gifts, bequests, field collection, and conversion).[35] It facilitates quicker acquisition and could prevent missed opportunities as museums wait, hoping for materials to eventually be donated. This is especially the case with the collection of everyday objects. Purchase may almost be preferred to waiting for desired items to be offered, because there is no way of ensuring they ever will be. The local museum is likely not the first place that comes to mind when someone has objects used daily that they no longer need. Conversely, making a call for everyday items could result in a deluge of donations, many of which may be unwanted.

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[34] Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, ed., *Museum Registration Methods 5th Edition* (Washington, D.C.: The AAM Press, 2010), 47. The full definition given is: "Field collections are made more frequently by science, anthropology, history, and archaeology museums than by art museums. They may be a series of purchases acquired during an expedition, or they may be collections of scientific or archaeological specimens that are collected in a field research project or archaeological excavation. Purchases are generally made from persons who made or used the objects, and the recording of provenience, materials, techniques and use are vital to the purchase record. Archaeological material should be accompanied by complete field notes. Field collections are increasingly subjected to legal restrictions, particularly regulations on export from the country of origin and laws dealing with repatriation to Native American or native Hawaiian groups and endangered species. (*See chapter on NAGPRA.*) The museum must be aware of all potential restrictions and obtain applicable permits and customs releases before bringing material from the field to the museum. The registrar should, with help of legal counsel, research the legal title to the collections returned to the museum before they go through the acquisitions process and are accessioned into the permanent collection."

[35] Ibid, 44.

The practice of collecting contemporary items lacks full support by some museum professionals and community members despite the fact that some institutions have been doing so since the end of the nineteenth century. There are many reasons for that, which will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis of survey responses in Chapter 4. One common qualm, however, is simply the multitude available. How do we decide, in our own time, what is most important and deserves to be saved? It is such a difficult practice "because of its overwhelming and multifaceted nature, and because we are collecting things that reflect our own society, which we know to be complex. Collecting historical material only seems easier because there is less of it, we know it less well, and because historians have constructed narratives which value one thing above another."[36] The notion that it is harder to collect that which we know better is somewhat counterintuitive. Yet, there is something to it. For example, is bias—or the potential for bias—more significant with things we see and use every day, or those related to news stories heard daily, than objects from before our time? In collecting contemporary material, museum professionals do not have the ability to anticipate future interest in an object. We are in a sense deciding what will remain.

Multiple attendees at the previously mentioned AASLH "A Common Agenda Conference" in 1987 argued that professionals in the field are well equipped to face the challenge of deciding what will remain significant. Staff need to be trained to evaluate trends and not to doubt their ability to do so.[37] One speaker suggested museums should inform their audiences about the increased interest in the field in collecting contemporary materials, and then work with them to meet these needs."[38] Doing so would allow for greater communication between institutions and the communities in which they are located, allowing for them to better help one another. The suggestion was made thirty years

[36] Knell, "Altered values," 34.
[37] Schlereth, "Defining Collecting Missions," 28.
[38] "Collections," in *A Common Agenda for History Museums: Conference Proceedings, February 19-20, 1987,* edited by, Lonn W. Taylor (Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1987), 9.

ago and, in some cases, institutions are still struggling with this today, specifically with regard to visitors not understanding why everyday items are acquired. This topic will be covered further in Chapter 4 in relation to survey responses.

Contemporary materials have the power to fundamentally change the makeup of a museum's collection. Susan M. Pearce characterizes three basic modes of collecting: "'collections as 'souvenirs,' as 'fetish objects' and as 'systematics.'"[39] Historically, private collectors, such as Henry Clay Frick and J. P. Morgan engaged in "fetishistic" or "obsessive" collecting, as decisions were based on their own individual needs and wants. Systematics refers to acquisition based on classifications. An item is selected as an example of all others like it. Materials collected based on each of these three motivations are seen in museums today, but it seems as if engaging in contemporaneous collecting has the potential to increase the number Pearce describes as souvenirs. As items associated with a single individual or group, she argues that, "Souvenirs are samples of events which can be remembered, but not relived." They "speak of events that are not repeatable, but are reportable…they help to reduce a large and complex experience…to a smaller and simpler scale of which people can make some sense."[40] The events professionals have attended (or gone to in the aftermath) are often spontaneous, responding to events such as tragedy, political policy changes, or climate change. The posters created for women's marches across the country following the 2016 election, for example, reflect issues people were most concerned about at that moment. They provide a snapshot in time. While similar events may occur later, none will be exactly the same.

Common materials began to grow in importance for museums and private collectors in the late twentieth century in Europe and the United States. In 1967, Ellis Burcaw, former Director of the University Museum, University of Idaho, argued that, "'history museums should collect everyday

[39] Pearce, "Collecting Reconsidered," 194.
[40] Ibid, 195.

objects: tin cans and bread wrappers, pizza pans and sneakers, toys, wallpaper samples … [and should] photograph the interiors of refrigerators, pantries and kitchen cupboards…homes and places of work' for future generations."[41] One result of such a collection approach can be seen in the People's Show Project in the 1990s, undertaken by Peter Jenkinson at the Walsall Museum and Art Gallery near Birmingham and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada. For this project, the compilations of local private collectors such as baseball caps, McDonalds toys, and train tickets were shown in museums.[42] To do so, "each venue [drew] on the collections within their local community and [organized] their own show in their own way."[43] The project attracted individuals who would not normally be involved in museums, and made them excited to participate. While using a slightly different method, there are institutions across the United States becoming more responsive to their communities and the stories and materials they have to share though community access galleries. History-focused institutions, in particular, are a natural fit. One model is the Minnesota History Center's Irvine Community Gallery. It is "dedicated to exhibits on socially responsive topics and issues that are relevant to Minnesotans today. Exhibitions are co-developed with local community groups and students."[44] The next temporary exhibition in 2019 will feature stories of twenty-two immigrants who now call Minnesota home using images, wall text and the like. Thus, rapid-response collecting is not limited to objects, but also oral histories, which can often provide greater context for collection objects as well.

Most historical examples of contemporary collecting demonstrate individual institutions working alone. A prominent—though exceptional—example of a combined effort is Samdok, a

[41] Ellis Burcaw quoted in Rhys, *Contemporary Collecting,* 55.
[42] Jo Digger, "The People's Show," in *The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting, Volume 4*, *Contemporary Voices*, ed. Susan Pearce and Paul Martin (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2002), 76.
[43] Ibid, 74.
[44] "Community," Minnesota History Center, accessed February 3, 2019, http://www.mnhs.org/historycenter/activities/community#irvine.

network of cultural history museums in Sweden. Founded in 1977, it initially focused on the "collecting of artefacts," later adding the larger goal of the "recording of present day life."[45] The organization ultimately had around eighty members and was active until 2011. The name of the network—an abbreviation of *samtidsdokumentation*—itself highlights their goal: "contemporary documentation."[46] The formation of the organization coincided with the centennial anniversary of the Nordiska Museet, Sweden's foremost cultural history museum and host of the network.[47] At that time, it was discovered that most of the institution's holdings fell primarily between 1750 and 1870 and focused on "agriculture and pre-industrial craft activities," drastically under-representing—or not representing at all— "lower social groups and industrial activity." This was a major concern, as it is considered the "national memory bank of the Swedish people," seen as responsible for preserving Swedish history, and some of that history was not being reflected.[48] There was an overwhelming belief in the importance of filling this gap, which included collecting mass-produced items in the country, sometimes directly from production companies as well as belongings from individual households such as furniture, photographs of a home's interior and exterior, and hobby equipment.[49] This provided clear provenance for the materials regarding when they were created, how they were created, and by whom. Information about an item's uses and cultural significance was often gathered through oral histories.

Samdok's members emphasized collaboration in order to make the task of collecting contemporary materials more manageable as well as to share responsibility. Membership in the

[45] Eva Fagerborg, "Samdok – from innovation to integration," in *Proceedings of CIDOC06* (Gothenburg, Sweden: September 2006), 3.
[46] Rhys, *Contemporary Collecting,* 58.
[47] Bodil Axelsson, "Samdok – Collecting and Networking the Nation as it Evolves," in *Proceedings of Current Issues in European Cultural Studies Conference* (Norrkoping, Sweden: Linköping University Electronic Press, June 2011): 177.
[48] Steen, "Samdok: tools to make the world visible," 198.
[49] Elizabet Stavenow-Hidemark, "Home thoughts from abroad: an evaluation of the SAMDOK Homes Pool," in *Museums in the Material World,* ed. Simon Knell (New York: Routledge, 2007), 56.

network was voluntary and divided into pools, comprised of different types of institutions such as local and national. Museums could "choose to join particular pools based on their collections, the economic structure of the county, and/or their special field of interest." Some examples of pools are the "Home Pool" and the "Group for Cultural Encounters Pool."[50] Members conducted research projects and fieldwork, resulting in publications and exhibitions. These pools were a resource in themselves because members could learn from one another about past projects and ways to improve them. It also connected industry professionals from different parts of the country and from institutions with unique types of collection materials who might not otherwise have met. Samdok was a noteworthy network for many reasons. It solidified the importance—even necessity—of collecting contemporary materials, and provided institutions with a reliable framework for doing so. Though Samdok is an example from outside of the United States, it demonstrates a way organizations can collaborate to collect contemporary material that can be used as a model by cultural history museums in the United States—even if done on a smaller scale. It also provides an example of staff examining an institution, seeing flaws, and finding a way to improve in order to better reflect the society in which it is located.

Contemporary collecting was becoming more prominent in the 1970s in the United States as Samdok was developing in Europe. Materials from the U.S. social movements of the 1960s—such as women's liberation, anti-war, and civil rights for ethnic minority groups—were starting to be collected, with an emphasis on the artifacts of political opposition groups.[51] In some cases, they were accumulated specifically for the purpose of an exhibition. For example, in November and December 1978, Professor David G. Orr and student Mark R. Ohno planned an exhibition at the University of Pennsylvania of anti-Vietnam War political buttons and related items they had gathered themselves

[50] Steen, "Samdok: tools to make the world visible," 199-200.
[51] Rhys, *Contemporary Collecting,* 52-53.

at demonstrations during the 1960s and 1970s; additional materials from protest movements worldwide were solicited through calls and letters.[52] In these letters, Orr and Ohno "invited groups to contribute their thoughts in order to maintain a balanced outlook."[53] They did face some backlash, stating, "Critics have accused us of plying our material as 'instant nostalgia' aimed at thousands of demonstration 'veterans' for their particular self-gratification and ego trip. Nothing could be farther from our own basic desires."[54] The potential for such negative responses is inherent when collecting contemporary material, despite best intentions. This is particularly true with political and other more controversial items, but also with those related to a difficult event such as a tragedy. Regardless, possible criticism should not deter institutions from engaging in this activity. Bringing more such artifacts into museums provide a space to discuss what is going on in society.

Contemporaneous acquisition by some institutions takes the form of "disaster collecting", that is, springing into action in the wake of natural disasters or "moments of crisis in the nation that need to be carefully preserved."[55] This is what happened in the aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001. Less than a month later, on October 4, museum professionals representing thirty "history-based" institutions—including the Smithsonian National Museum of American History (NMAH), the New-York Historical Society, the New York State Museum, the New York City Fire Museum, and the New Jersey Historical Society—gathered at the Museum of the City of New York to coordinate a response.[56] They had major concerns with regard to collecting materials, wanting to

[52] David G. Orr and Mark R. Ohno, "The Material Culture of Protest: A Case Study in Contemporary Collecting" in *Twentieth-Century Popular Culture in Museums and Libraries*, ed. Fred E.H. Schroeder (Bowing Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), 41.
[53] Rhys, *Contemporary Collecting*, 54.
[54] "Orr and Ohno, "The Material Culture of Protest," 37.

[55] Courtney Rivard, "Collecting Disaster: National Identity and the Smithsonian's September 11 Collection," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 31, no. 2: Special Issue: "The Materials of American Studies" (December 2012): 88.
[56] Seidler Ramirez, "Present Imperfect," 60.

be respectful of those who lost loved ones and not "appear 'ghoulish in the face of bereavement.'"[57] They were also concerned about gathering items "associated with an active criminal investigation…and a smoldering funeral pyre." In addition, questions arose "about how foraging for artifacts uncured by time, saved by virtue of their availability, might bias later explanations of the causes and consequences of September 11."[58] How do industry professionals remain sensitive and not interfere with recovery efforts? Many such challenges remain today with this type of collecting.

There was also the question of what to select, as there was no shortage of material related to the tragedy and the aftermath. The Washington, D.C.–based NMAH decided to collect "a small representative group of objects" within a "chronology of events—what issues led to the attack, the attack, the recovery, the cleanup effort, and lasting impact of the events of September 11, 2001."[59] Most fell into four primary categories: rescuers' tools; articles belonging to victims; uniforms worn and tools used by firefighters and police officers; and items from temporary memorials.[60] Along with the objects, stories of their former owners or those who used them were also logged, providing the objects with greater context so that a more complete story could be told beyond the fact that they were associated with the day. Mementos were also saved from memorials and shrines, demonstrating how people grieved and honored the lives lost.

By 2001, the internet functioned as an invaluable venue for collaboration. A significant result of this collective effort was the creation of the website www.911history.net by the Museum of the City of New York and the NMAH in Washington D.C., which enabled quick and respectful

[57] Rivard, "Collecting Disaster," 90.
[58] Seidler Ramirez, "Present Imperfect," 60.
[59] Rivard, "Collecting Disaster," 90.
[60] Ibid, 92.

communication about what was being collected in the aftermath of the attacks.[61] This provided a way for participating institutions and the public to follow the progress being made. Museums could also use the site to point donors in the direction of the appropriate institution. Collaboration was crucial in this situation as it helped to prevent rivalry. Combined objectives and a "steering committee" allowed the group ultimately to have more access to the site.[62] Somewhat inherent in the phenomenon of contemporaneous collecting is the potential for competition. In the case of 9/11, working together from the outset prevented each museum from acting in their own self-interest and resulted in a more respectful response.

Though the scale of collaboration was unprecedented in the United States, contemporaneous collecting per se was not a new practice for many of the New York City-based institutions. As previously mentioned, the New-York Historical Society (N-YHS) had been acquiring contemporary materials from as early as 1804. They had even "branded" the activity, calling it their "History Responds" initiative. In fact, the organization was uniquely prepared to respond to the tragedy because the staff had been practicing "drills for swift collecting" for the previous eighteen months, part of a larger strategy for better engaging with their public.[63] The N-YHS still engages in the practice today, and the institution is extremely active, gathering items from events like women's marches and other protests, as well as Matthew "Levee" Chavez's *Subway Therapy* in the form of Post-it notes covering the walls of the Union Square subway station in New York City after the 2016 presidential election.[64] The Museum of the City of New York began contemporary collecting in the late twentieth century. Some acquired materials demonstrate the changing society as a whole, such as

[61] The Museum of the City of New York and the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Behring Center, "Collections," Nine Eleven History Dot Net. Accessed November 16, 2018, http://911history.net/collections.htm.
[62] Seidler Ramirez, "Present Imperfect," 61-62.
[63] Ibid, 64.
[64] Claire L. Lanier, "Preserving History, One Sticky Note at a Time," *New-York Historical Society*, accessed February 3, 2019, http://behindthescenes.nyhistory.org/preserving-history-one-sticky-note-at-a-time/.

a typewriter no longer used in offices and a gender-neutral road construction sign from the mid-1980s that says "People Working;" other items show how New York City itself is changing, through photographs of various neighborhoods then and now, along with other artifacts.[65]

Since the late twentieth century, there has been an attempt to widen the scope of who gets represented in the holdings of a socially responsible museum. In the past, the stories told through objects tended to focus on the wealthy elite, disregarding the stories of common people. How do institutions keep their existing collection relevant and at the forefront, while also addressing this significant and extremely important shift in focus to audiences? Stated simply: rapid-response collecting. More modern collecting practices have served to rectify, or at least make progress towards rectifying, this "problem." There are multiple ways in which museums have engaged with contemporary collecting in order to increase diversity in its exhibitions and programs. Contemporaneous collection does not have to be limited to objects. In some cases, oral histories are taken by museums as they are contemporaneously collecting objects; in other cases, they stand on their own.

Many museums today—as long as it is a mission fit—have begun acquiring contemporary material. Typically, these are certain types of history museums, such as those focusing on state and local history as well as sports. Contemporaneous collecting presents a drastically different form of collecting than has traditionally been performed. The practice is rooted in the early nineteenth century with the New-York Historical Society's acquisition of American Revolution-related materials, but it was not fully embraced by the profession until the late twentieth century. So what is the current state of rapid-response collecting and contemporaneous collecting specifically, in the

[65] Miller, "Collecting the Current for History Museums," 165.

United States? The next two chapters will explore this through the analysis of my nationally distributed survey. Chapter 3 will examine its quantitative data.

Chapter 3: How Many, How Often, How Widespread: Results of a Survey on Contemporary Collecting

Chapter 2 demonstrates that contemporaneous collecting as a form of rapid-response collecting is not new.[66] Museums have been engaged in this activity for decades. Chapter 3 addresses the state of this type of acquisition in the United States today based on a survey I devised. It was distributed it to institutions nationwide, seeking both qualitative and quantitative data from museum professionals. (For the full survey, see Appendix A.) Chapter 3 analyzes the survey's quantitative data. The assessment reveals that museums of all sizes and locations in the United States are engaging in contemporaneous collecting, and that even museum professionals at institutions not doing so are interested in the practice.

The title—"How Many, How Often, How Widespread?"—summarizes my survey's three major areas of inquiry: how many museums participate in this form of collecting? How many events have staff members attended? Approximately how many objects in their collection were acquired in this way? The question of "how widespread" also refers to which regions of the country engage in the practice most actively. The survey further seeks to determine if these three categories were impacted by staff size. How does the number of full-time employees and location relate, if at all, to the undertaking of this type of collecting?

Distribution of the Survey

The survey was distributed to museums using three methods. It was posted to the "Museum Junction" forum sponsored by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM); sent to the listserv of the AAM Collections Stewardship Committee (CSAAM); and shared with the Seton Hall University

[66] Rapid response collecting refers to all collection of contemporary material whether through donation, purchase, or field collection. Contemporaneous collecting refers specifically to field collection by museum professionals attending events such as rallies, protests, marches, or the aftermath of natural disasters.

Master of Arts in Museum Professions Program (MAMP) listserv, which includes current students, professors, and hundreds of alumni. These specific venues were chosen in order to access the knowledge of museum professionals in all regions of the United States. As the AAM website states, the organization has 35,000 members connected to museum operations.[67] Posting the survey on the AAM site allowed for the greater possibility of more responses not only from across the country, but also from museum professionals of more varied backgrounds and expertise. The survey was sent to the CSAAM Listserv for the perspective of those involved in collections management and acquisitions specifically. It was disseminated to the Seton Hall University MAMP listserv as it had the potential to connect me to museum professionals nationwide at various points in their careers working in different museum departments, reflective of the Seton Hall program's four tracks (registration, exhibitions, education, and management). Ultimately, 38 individuals fully completed the survey, and an additional 28 partially completed it.

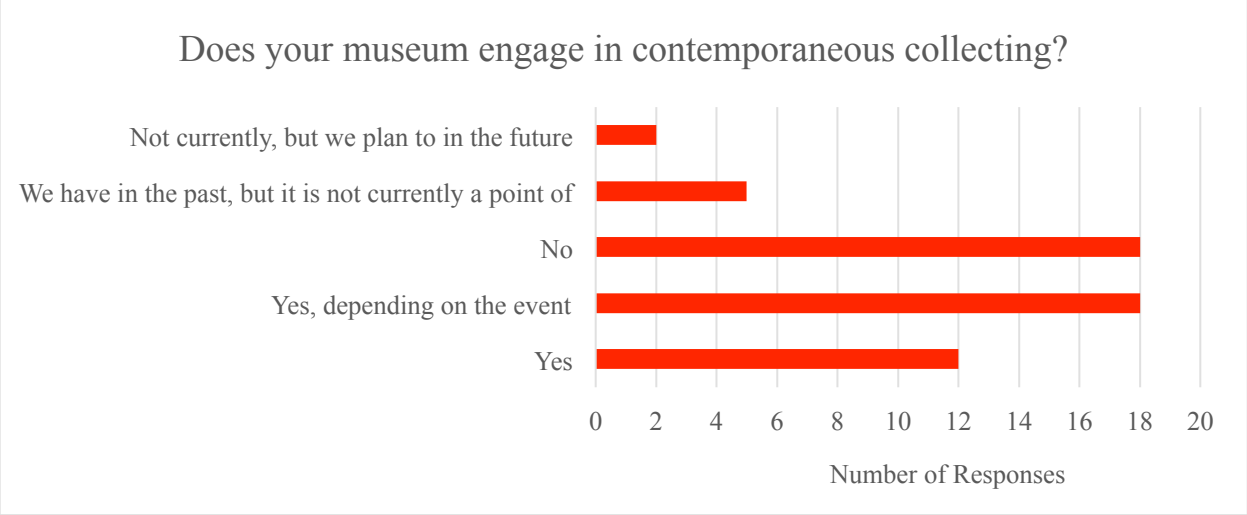
General Interest in Contemporaneous Collecting

Survey responses indicate an overall interest in contemporaneous collecting, although support is by no means unanimous. (See Figure 1.) Thirty-three percent of survey participants indicated that their museum does not acquire materials this way. The same percentage responded "yes, depending on the event." An additional 22% gave an unqualified "yes" to the question. The difference between "yes" and "yes, depending on the event" is that the former implies a more recurring effort towards this contemporaneous collecting, while the latter represents institutions that undertake the practice only when specific events occur. About 4% of respondents noted that their institutions were not currently gathering materials this way, but that they planned to in the future.

[67] The organization's efforts benefit "more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, institutions, and corporate partners." "About AAM," American Alliance of Museums, accessed January 3, 2019, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-aam/.

This appears to reveal the growing interest in contemporaneous collecting, as more institutions are acknowledging its benefits. There were, however, five institutions that engaged in the practice previously, but now no longer do so. While the decrease could indicate a change in priorities at the institutions, it could also point to its associated challenges.

Figure 1:

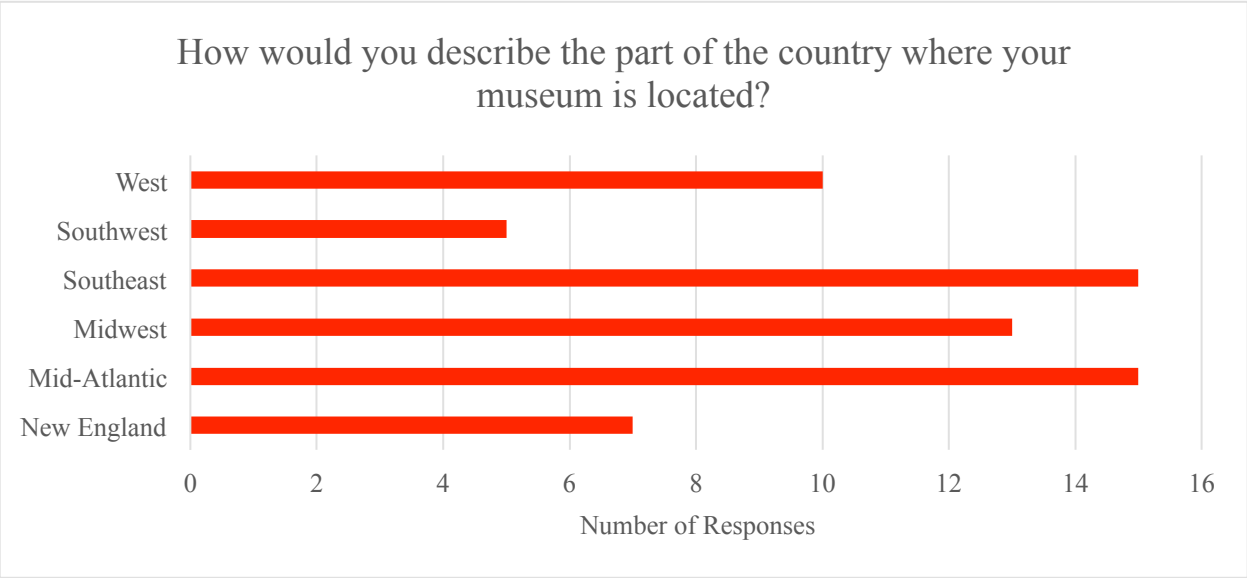


The goal of casting a wide net was reached, as respondents represented museums from across the country. Survey takers were asked to indicate the location of their institution from the following categories: New England, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Southeast, Southwest, and West. These categories were derived from those used by the AAM in order to use designations with which professionals would be familiar.[68] Survey responders represented all six regions. The Mid-Atlantic and Southeast were most prominent, with fifteen participants from each region, although not far behind was the Midwest at thirteen (See Figure 2). The wide range of geographic representation demonstrates the relevancy of rapid-response collecting and contemporaneous collecting nationally. As will be

[68] "Council of Regional Associations," American Alliance of Museums, accessed December 15, 2018, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-aam/council-of-regional-associations/.

discussed in the following pages, not all respondents work at institutions engaging in these practices; however, members in the field across the country believe that it is an important topic to discuss.

Figure 2:



Regional location appears to have an impact on whether an institution is involved in contemporaneous collection. The practice is most common among organizations located in the Southeast. (See Figure 3). Eleven institutions from the region engage in the practice: five answering "yes" and six answering "depending on the event." Not too far behind was the Midwest with seven institutions involved, although the responses were not as evenly split—only one organization put "yes," while it depended on the event for the other six. It is important to note that these two regions—the Southeast and Midwest—accounted for the most people responding to the survey at fifteen and twelve individuals respectively, which could contribute to these higher results.

Figure 3:

Cross-tabulation of survey questions 4 and 10

		Does your museum engage in contemporaneous collecting?					
		Yes	Yes, depending on the event	No	We have in the past, but it is not currently a point of emphasis for us	Not currently, but we plan to in the future	Total
How would you describe the part of the country where your museum is located?	New England	0	0	4	0	1	5
	Mid-Atlantic	0	2	4	2	0	8
	Midwest	1	6	3	1	1	12
	Southeast	5	6	4	0	0	15
	Southwest	2	1	0	1	0	4
	West	4	3	2	1	0	10
	Total	12	18	17	5	2	54

Survey data shows that contemporaneous collecting is more common among urban institutions. Eight urban institutions answered "yes" to contemporaneously collecting, which is double the response of suburban museums, and eleven answered "yes, depending on the event," a little over two times the number of suburban respondents. No rural organizations responded "yes" and only two said that it was dependent on the event. (See Figure 4). Those are quite drastically different numbers. That said, the sample size for urban institutions is almost double that of suburban institutions; therefore, on a national scale suburban institutions may be engaging in the practice at the same level as their urban counterparts, even if museum professionals from urban institutions responded in greater numbers to the survey. The same could be said about rural institutions. Sixty-three percent of those surveyed classified their institution's location as urban, while just 9% identified their institution as rural. It is important to note that location did not seem to have an impact

on whether or not an institution planned to engage in contemporaneous collection in the future, but urban institutions were much more likely to have done so in the past, even if no longer doing so.

Figure 4:

Cross-tabulation of survey questions 3 and 10

		Does your museum engage in contemporaneous collecting?					
		Yes	Yes, depending on the event	No	We have in the past, but it is not currently a point of emphasis for us	Not currently, but we plan to in the future	Total
What best describes the location of your museum?	Urban	8	11	8	4	1	32
	Suburban	4	5	7	1	0	17
	Rural	0	2	3	0	1	6
	Total	12	18	18	5	2	55

Staffing Impact on Contemporaneous Collecting

An assumption I made prior to sending out the survey was that museums with a larger staff would be more likely to engage in contemporaneous collecting because of the additional staff time necessary to acquire these materials. It was anticipated that museums with a smaller staff would simply not have the capacity to engage in the practice. Moreover, most of the coverage on the topic in non-academic (i.e., mainstream) media references larger institutions, such as the New-York Historical Society, the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, and European institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.[69] The data collected in the survey demonstrates that this is not, in fact, the case. Contemporaneous collection proved most common

[69] Graham Bowley, "In an Era of Strife, Museums Collect History as it Happens," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/arts/design/african-american-museum-collects-charlottesville-artifacts.html.

among museums with a staff between 6 to 15 members, the second most common being institutions with 1 to 5 staff members (See Figure 5). While it is possible that institutions with fewer staff members are actually more involved in the practice, part of what could account for this is the lower numbers of respondents from larger institutions more generally. Only three respondents had a staff of more than 200, one had 151 to 200, and none had 101 to 150. Nearly half had either between 1 to 5 or 6 to 15 staff members—totaling about 48% of those who filled out the survey.

Figure 5:

Cross-tabulation of survey questions 5 and 10

		How many full-time staff members does your institution have?									
		1-5	6-15	16-30	31-50	51-70	71-100	101-150	151-200	More than 200	Total
Does your museum currently engage in contemporaneous collecting?	Yes	2	2	3	2	1	1	0	0	1	12
	Yes, depending on the event	4	7	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	17
	No	7	3	3	0	2	1	0	1	1	18
	We have in the past, but it is not currently a point of emphasis for us	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
	Not currently, but we plan to in the future	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Total	15	14	8	4	5	4	0	1	3	54

Onsite Collecting

Over half of survey participants noted working at institutions that had attended events to collect materials, while 33% of respondents noted that their institutions had not collected at events at

all (See Figure 1 above.) Although the survey's sample size is small, the fact that a little over one-third do not engage in the practice does signal that while institutions may be collecting contemporary items through more conventional means, actively going outside the institution to do so is not being pursued. It could also be that the practice is beginning to increase in 2019, as the most common answer was between 1 and 10 events. The low number of events visited could also demonstrate that while there is clearly an interest in the practice at these institutions, they do not have the staff time or storage space to go to more events. Three participants answered that staff from their institutions had collected at 11 to 20 events, while just two had gone to 21 to 30. While one respondent noted that their institution's staff had gone to several hundred events, this was nowhere near the norm. Based on the results from this survey, it appears that contemporaneous collection has been eagerly embraced by some institutions, although others are just starting to undertake the practice, are unable to, or do not see it as a priority at this time.

Acquisition

The next logical step after analyzing how many events museum staff have attended to collect materials is to look at how many items have actually been collected. The most common response was a total of 1 to 100 objects, at 44% of responses. This seems a manageable number of objects to be collected at 1 to 10 events. That being said, the number of items collected does depend on many factors such as object size, the nature of the event, and the number of staff that attend. The topic of material types collected and criteria for decision-making will be discussed further in Chapter 4. Four survey participants noted having 101 to 300 pieces in their collection acquired through contemporaneous collection, while just one said their institution had 301 to 500 or 701 to 900 items. Twenty-four percent of respondents had not collected any materials. While there are those few

examples of large numbers of contemporaneously collected materials in museum collections, it appears presently that they do not make up a large part of collections at most institutions.

The survey made a clear distinction between contemporaneous and rapid response collecting, and sought to determine how many pieces have been collected by each method. The number of respondents who have no materials in their collection from rapid response, versus contemporaneous collecting, differs slightly. Fourteen said that they have no materials in their collections by way of the latter, while ten said that they have none by way of the former. This would seem to signal that there are institutions collecting contemporary materials, just not by actively going out themselves. In responses for both iterations of collecting, the most respondents stated that their institution has 1 to 100 objects in their collection by both types of collection—55% said so for rapid response collection and 44% for contemporaneous collection. Each type of acquisition had three participants reporting that their museums' collections had 101 to 300 objects. Interestingly, there was one institution that has 701 to 900 contemporaneously collected objects in its collection, while the same could not be said for rapid-response collecting. A few participants noted, however, that it was hard to assign a number or estimate because rapid-response was the basis for all of their collecting and the number would be quite large.

One of the characteristics of contemporaneous collection is the fairly rapid selection of objects. When given the option of hours, days, or weeks, 60% of respondents said that they typically spend hours actively selecting materials. If an event is a single day in duration, this faster selection is necessary, as waiting would likely result in missed opportunities simply because of the necessity of removing them from the site. Such situations have been highlighted in media coverage on the topic. For example, in May 2018, Brenda Malone, a curator at the National Museum of Ireland, climbed lamp posts to collect campaign posters following the country's greatly debated abortion

referendum.[70] Once the referendum occurred, there was not a reason for these posters to line the street anymore, having served their purpose. Clean-up crews would likely come through not long after. In situations like this one, and events such as marches or demonstrations, acting quickly is a necessity.

Most survey takers noted making quick decisions when selecting materials. However, "days" and "weeks" were each cited by 20% of respondents. What might account for these much longer timelines when responding to events? While an event may occur on a single day, its repercussions can last longer. Some institutions conduct contemporaneous collecting after natural disasters and tragedies. The ramifications of natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes can reverberate for weeks and even months. As discussed in the previous chapter, the response after 9/11 was a concerted effort over time. Following the Pulse Nightclub massacre in Orlando, staff from the Orange County Regional History Center spent more than a month on-site collecting materials for their "One Orlando" Collection.[71] Sometimes, depending on the nature of the event, organizations have the advantage of sustained access when contemporaneously collecting for their collections.

Longer decision-making periods could also be related to rapid-response collecting more broadly, as opposed to contemporaneous collecting more specifically. There are institutions that collect contemporary materials in the more conventional sense of receiving donations instead of proactively gathering in the field as well as by attending events. The New-York Historical Society, for example, posted a call for items related to the 2016 presidential inauguration on their website, and

[70] Alex Marshall, "Posters, Banners, Boarding Passes: Museums Try to Get a Head Start on History," *The New York Times,* June 18, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/18/arts/design/rapid-response-collecting-ireland-berlin.html.
[71] Pam Schwartz, Whitney Broadway, Emilie S. Arnold, Adam M. Ware, and Jessica Domingo, "Rapid-Response Collecting after the Pulse Nightclub Massacre," *Public Historian* 40, no. 1 (February 2018): 106.

made a subsequent call regarding women's marches and protests across the country.[72] Staff from the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture attend events to acquire materials on site, but also contact attendees in the aftermath to gather items they brought home.[73] Obtaining contemporary materials in this way allows for more time to discern an object's appropriateness for the collection.

This chapter serves as an analysis of the scope of contemporaneous collecting. In summary, responses from the survey demonstrated that the practice is most common at urban institutions; institutions in the Southeastern United States; and at museums with a staff between six and fifteen people. Contemporaneously collected material does not account for large percentages of museum collections at this point, and while it is fully embraced by some institutions, this is not the norm. While Chapter 3 answered the questions "How Many? How Often? How Widespread?", Chapter 4 will examine what influences an institution's decision to collect contemporaneously, the benefits and challenges they have faced while doing so, and how it has affected the exhibitions and programming.

[72] New-York Historical Society Staff, "Donate Items from Inauguration, Women's Marches, and Nationwide Protests," *New-York Historical Society,* January 23, 2017, http://behindthescenes.nyhistory.org/donate-items-from-the-womens-marches/.
[73] Bowley, "In an Era of Strife."

Chapter 4: Why Contemporaneously Collect?

This chapter addresses how the practice of contemporaneous collecting has impacted the institutions that engage in it. To be examined are ways in which they have benefitted, the challenges they have faced, the influence on their exhibitions and programs, types of materials acquired, and visitor response. Also examined are the reasons why museums cannot—or choose not to—engage in this form of acquisition. Lastly, the question of whether the practice should be pursued in the future is posed. It appears that those engaging in rapid response and contemporaneous collecting are profoundly impacted by them because of their many advantages. There are, however, associated challenges, which prevent some from engaging in the practices.

Issues of Space, Staffing, and Focus

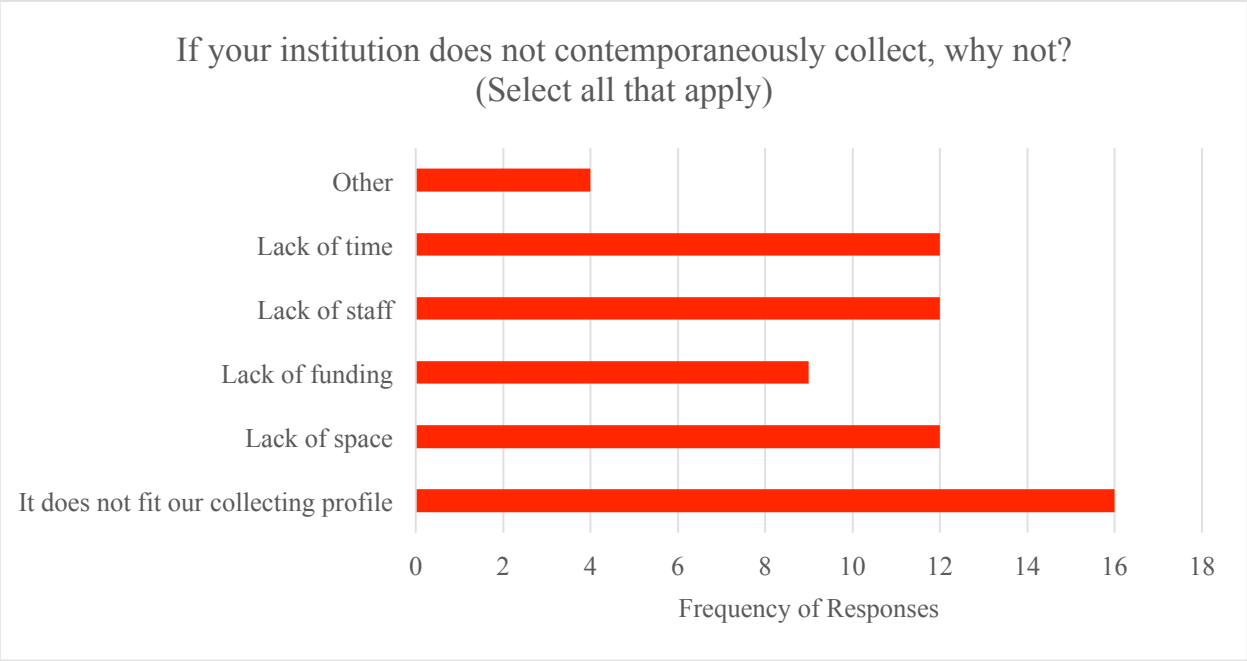
There are many reasons why a staff decides not to contemporaneously collect, from the lack of connection to mission to limitations of space, staff, time and funding. The most common, accounting for about 25% of respondents, was "it does not fit our collecting profile."[74] The range of institutions represented by the survey included (but were not limited to) art, local and state history, military history**,** science, material culture, facets of American history, sports history, natural history, and anthropology. A museum professional from a suburban New England institution noted that its profile is "local art and historical objects," so they wait for donors to approach them with older items as opposed to gathering onsite.[75] Another respondent, from a small rural museum in the Midwest, pointed to the lack of a defined policy or procedure as a reason not to contemporaneously collect. While this is in reference to mandates at the institutional level, it suggests that profession-wide guidelines could be created by the American Alliance of Museums or another professional

[74] Participants were given multiple options in my survey, including a personal comment (See Figure 1.)
[75] Author's survey, 2019.

organization. If not guidelines, at least advice for initiating contemporaneous collecting would help. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Survey results demonstrate that a combination of additional factors contribute to the inability to contemporaneously collect. Lack of space, staff, and time each made up around 18% of total responses. (See Figure 6.) This is predictable considering the higher number of survey participants working at smaller museums, with about half having 15 or fewer staff members. Limited staff typically means that each staff member has a wider variety of responsibilities compared to professionals at larger organizations who have more specialized roles. When a staff numbers less than five, collecting at events onsite, even if desired, would likely not always be a priority or even feasible.

Figure 6:



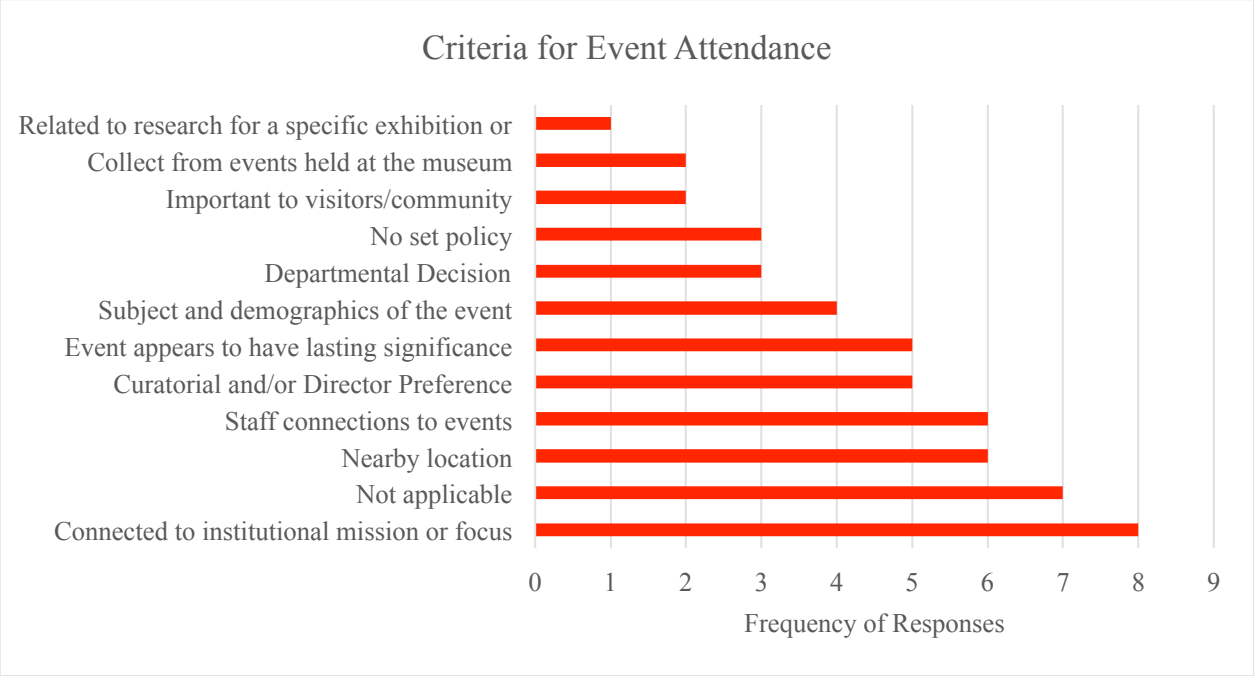
Criteria for Event Attendance

Mission

How do institutions choose which events are worth attending for contemporaneous collection? The survey reveals that criteria used can vary between the impromptu and premeditated. The most common cited in the survey were: direct connection to their institutional mission or focus, nearby location, staff connections to events, curator or director preference, and the event's projected importance. Figure 7 below diagrams the preponderance of common answers. While some responses fall under just one of the categories, others fit in more than one. Out of all of the responses, the events' relation to mission or focus was the most common criterion: an unsurprising result. Everything a museum does should, in theory, reinforce and further its purpose; if an event does not, it is likely that its associated materials will not be relevant to their exhibitions and programs.

Many respondents cited the relation to mission as a criterion for both deciding which events to attend as well as what to gather once there. However, a majority—a sizeable 70%—stated that rapid-response collecting was not addressed as part of their institution's collections management policy, although 16% said that they have thought about adding it. The results concerning contemporaneous collecting in museum policy are slightly different. Although the majority of respondents said that their institutions do not address it, a solid 31% do, and about 15% were considering it. The fact that more include contemporaneous as opposed to rapid-response collecting is logical; the latter refers to the acquisition of contemporary materials generally, so institutions do not feel the need to distinguish between the acquisition of present-day and historical materials. Contemporaneous collection, on the other hand, requires increased planning because of its proactive nature. The high number of "no" responses about its inclusion in an institution's collections policy could be related to the number of respondents working at museums not engaged in the practice in the first place. With adherence to mission playing such a crucial role in any decision regarding event attendance, it is surprising that on site collection is not usually included in most collecting policies.

Figure 7:



Event Location

An event's location is a primary concern in evaluating whether or not to attend. Many survey respondents work at institutions that center on state or local history. As such, many focus on and attend happenings in the region, such as sporting events, natural disasters, or political rallies. A respondent from an urban museum in western Canada wrote they selected those nearby that demonstrated "the fabric of the city."[76] Proceedings that take place nearby are likely to be more related to their mission, and also could be more relevant to visitors. Some even collect materials from events held *at* their institution. For example, a survey participant from a technology-centered museum on the West Coast noted "external clients" connected to their institution's focus using their space regularly for events, and offering both old and new items for the collection.[77]

Staff Availability

[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Many rely on the connections of staff, board members, and volunteers—outside the museum in both official and unofficial capacities—in event selection. This may account for the fact that many small institutions are engaging in the practice; despite having a small staff, they attend events themselves or send their volunteers to attend on its behalf. As a staffer from an urban institution in the Mid-Atlantic with 6-15 full-time employees eloquently put it, their institution tends to "be reactive, not proactive," and they rely on event participation by staff, board members, and volunteers alike.[78] While some events are planned in advance so museums can be proactive, this is not the case for tragedies or natural disasters. Museums need to be both proactive and reactive, planning for the planned, and ready for the unexpected. It may not always be possible or wise to send a staff member in an official capacity if there is not a guarantee that it will be worth their time. Effort in relation to potential return must always be considered.

Potential Significance

A decision to engage in onsite collecting relies on a bit of anticipatory evaluation to determine whether an event feels historic and might be interesting to visitors or of use to researchers in the future. Of course, there is no way of truly knowing if an event will have lasting significance, but museum staff can consider the subject of the event and the demographics of its participants in deciding whether or not to attend, as well as observe community members' responses to it in the case of acquisition in an event's aftermath. Some focus on what is important to the local community, while others also consider how it relates to what is happening in the state and nation. A participant from a small urban institution in the West specified that they attend events "which are clearly

[78] Ibid.

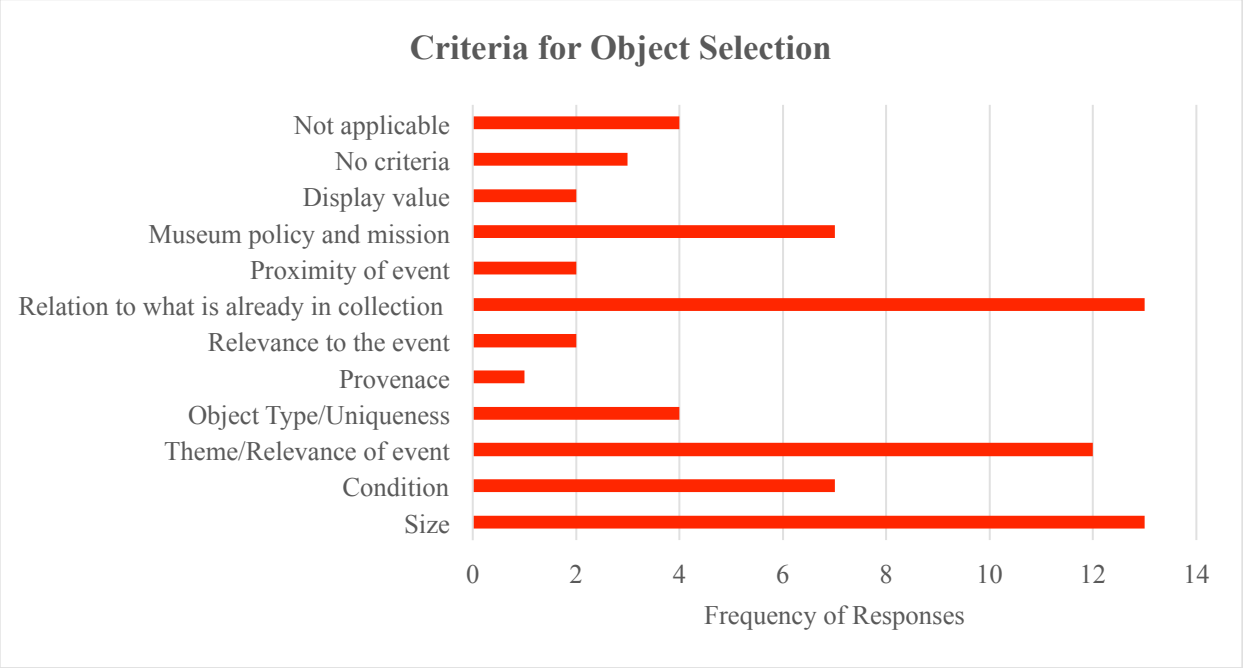
extraordinary expressions of the current zeitgeist."[79] In some museums, a curator or director makes the call on whether to attend, while at others it is a group decision by a collections committee.

Criteria for Object Selection

Museum staff members are often confronted with a multitude of materials for potential acquisition. For example, following the 2016 Women's March in Boston, it took five people from Northeastern University three hours to unload a van full of signs gathered, which totaled around 6,000 items.[80] With so many possibilities, institutions cannot, and should not, take most of the items they come across on site. Just as staff take into account many aspects of an object—provenance, size, and condition to name a few—when it is brought in as a conventional donation, the same is true when engaged in contemporaneous collection. In the survey, suggested considerations such as the theme of event, proximity of event, size of objects, and relation to materials already in a collection were provided, but participants could expound on these options. The most common criteria for selection were in fact object size, theme or relevance of the event, and relation of the item to what is already in their holdings. Each of these suggested responses were frequently cited, in addition to the others listed below in Figure 8. These three benchmarks mirror some of the major issues facing the museum world in 2019, namely, rising concern about storage space (or, more accurately, lack thereof), and how to maintain ongoing relevance. Some museum professionals said that their institutions do not currently have policies related specifically to selecting objects at events, but simply consider their overall ability to care for materials. Others are planning to write or are in the process of updating policies.

[79] Ibid.
[80] Barbara Howard, "Saving the Signs from the Boston's Women's March," *WGBH News,* January 23, 2017, https://www.wgbh.org/news/2017/01/23/local-news/listen-saving-signs-bostons-womens-march.

Figure 8:



Size and Condition

An object's size and condition directly relate to an institution's ability to care for it. Space remains a primary concern. Most respondents who mentioned size said that they tend to take smaller items such as buttons, flyers, t-shirts and hats that are representative of the event. A respondent from a large urban museum in the Midwest did note that they occasionally make exceptions for larger objects if they are "very iconic."[81] A less frequent response than size was condition. Are there inherent difficulties because of its materials? Most participants simply stated condition in their response, although one person from a small rural institution in the Southeast added that artifacts were chosen "based on conservation longevity," meaning they would "choose a textile over hard-to-care-for-paper crafts."[82] Museum staff must also consider if materials are dilapidated from use and being exposed to the elements. Following the Pulse Nightclub massacre in Orlando, Florida, on June 12,

[81] Author's survey, 2019.
[82] Ibid.

2016, employees from the Orange County Regional History Center contended with the summer heat and rain, and had to remove bugs, dead flowers, mold and moisture before bringing items in.[83] These are important considerations because the institution would have a responsibility to care for it, a task made more difficult from the start if a piece's condition is already deteriorating. The impact of an object on the safety of items already in the collection must also be considered.

Relationship to Current Holdings

Unsurprisingly, one of the most commonly cited criteria for object selection was the relationship to current holdings. This guideline closely aligns with the standards for acquisitions outlined in "A Code of Ethics for Curators" (2009) of the American Association of Museums Curators Committee (CurCom). The code states:

> Curators develop the collection under their care in conjunction with the museum's stated mission and other institutional policies, procedures, and documents. They identify deficiencies in the collection, review potential acquisitions, and provide compelling reasons for adding objects to the collection in accordance with the acquisition policy of their institution.[84]

This requires a strong understanding by staff of what is already well represented in their collection, along with a keen awareness of areas that can be strengthened. A staff member at a suburban museum in the Southwest mentioned that they actually have a list of artists and items missing from their holdings guiding their acquisition of new items. Preventing duplication and filling gaps relate not only to types of objects themselves in a collection, but also whose stories are being told. Given the other criteria for acquisitions in the CURCOM Code of Ethics, it was somewhat surprising that relevance to mission and museum policy did not rank higher amongst survey responses. This does not necessarily mean they are less important. Some may have assumed that mission was a given in

[83] Schwartz, "Preserving History As it Happens," 17.
[84] The Executive Committee of the Curators Committee of the American Alliance of Museums, "A Code of Ethics for Curators," American Alliance of Museums, 2009, https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/curcomethics.pdf.

addition to institutional policy regarding collections management, along with the assumption that when staff are acquiring materials—regardless of method—mission and these policies and procedures are always prioritized.

Significance of Event

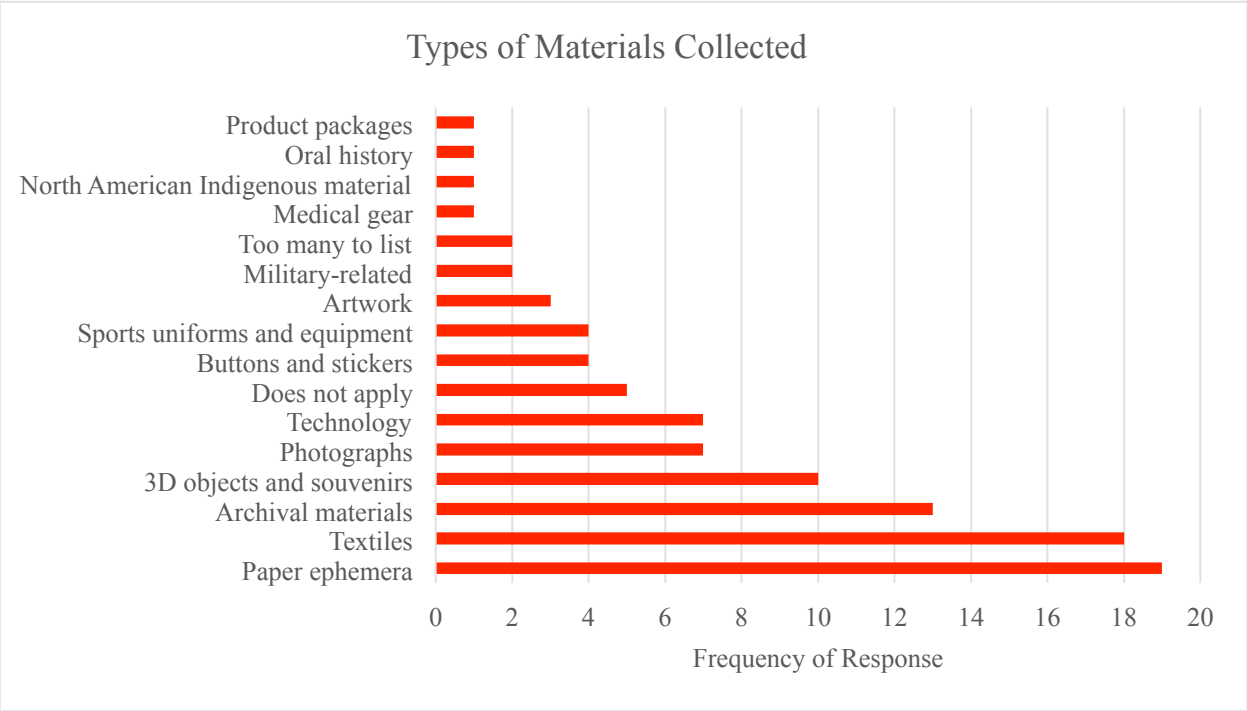
Objects not of a type in the collection may be deemed as important representatives of an event that is anticipated to have ongoing importance. The discussion of significance earlier in this chapter as related to criteria for event attendance can be applied here as well. Items are selected because of their ability to demonstrate the event's importance. This connects to the idea of uniqueness. While some select items based on the relevance of the event itself, others look at the impact the event had on the object, particularly related to natural disasters or athletic events. An urban institution in the Midwest focusing on sport pays attention to which players are doing well and those popular among fans, as well as any breaking or setting of records, and reacts accordingly when collecting uniforms. A few participants also noted selecting materials for their potential exhibition value and ability to tell a story.

Types of Objects Selected

The categories of contemporary materials assembled are quite diverse, as is made evident in the chart below (See Figure 9). Items in numerous media, of varying sizes and shapes, and addressing different subject matter are collected. Most objects are smaller, due in part to the decreasing space in museum collection storage areas. Most respondents had succinct lists of contemporary materials they have acquired, while others were more broad, mentioning three-dimensional objects or even saying "too many to list." The latter is understandable; collecting in the

moment, or at least not waiting to evaluate the significance, provides museum professionals with a plethora of possibilities for their collections.

Figure 9:



Paper ephemera, textiles, and archival materials are the most common forms of collected material. Paper ephemera comprises items of material culture such as signs, posters, fliers, brochures, booklets, and pamphlets. In the context of survey responses, the overall category of textiles most commonly refers to clothing and accessories, especially t-shirts and hats. Archival items were put in a separate category as it was broadly noted by multiple survey participants. Others cited specific archival items such as documents, books, and newspapers. Many respondents wanted to collect materials that really captured the spirit of the event, such as t-shirts emblazoned with an event logo or dates—which could also be found on posters, buttons and stickers, which are also frequently collected. Some survey participants mentioned gathering political signs and posters created specifically for an event, while others did not specify. Homemade signs or even clothing created by

event participants can express the feelings of the day. Photographs, which are also commonly acquired, provide a visual record of the event that can be displayed alone or accompany related event materials.

Most of the materials already mentioned are associated with a particular one-day event such as a rally or protest. But some of the contemporary items collected were often connected to events of longer duration. They ranged from sports equipment (baseballs, bases, bats, uniforms, golf clubs, golf balls) to technology-related objects (cellphones, tablets, and manuals) to military items (uniforms, honors and vestiges of base closures) to Native American materials. A small urban museum in the Mid-Atlantic collects items related to medical research such as "gear to treat Ebola patients…prostate molds and 3D printed animal cages…and objects from demonstrations about AIDS."[85] It is evident that the potential associated with acquiring contemporary materials is vast.

Deaccessioning

A major concern often mentioned in current literature is the possibility—even likelihood—that contemporaneous collecting and the acquisition of contemporary materials more generally will lead to an increased need to monitor for deaccessioning in the future because of their often ephemeral nature.[86] The outcome of the survey question on whether or not acquiring contemporary items will result in added future deaccessioning prove inconclusive. The response with the highest number of votes was "probably not," with ten, but "might or might not" followed as a close second with nine votes. There was not a resounding consensus either way. Interestingly, one respondent from a suburban institution in the Southeast mentioned "thoughtful deaccessioning" as a *benefit* of rapid-response and contemporaneous collecting at their museum, since materials previously had been

[85] Author's survey, 2019.
[86] Rhys, *Contemporary Collecting*, 26.

accepted largely based on a donor's reputation as opposed to how they complemented the existing collection and their mission.[87] In order to assess whether their institutions have room for new acquisitions, staff may evaluate what is already in their possession: how much is incompatible with the mission and collecting policies and could therefore be deaccessioned? Evaluation facilitates the identification of gaps existing in their holdings, which is helpful in the acquisition of new items.

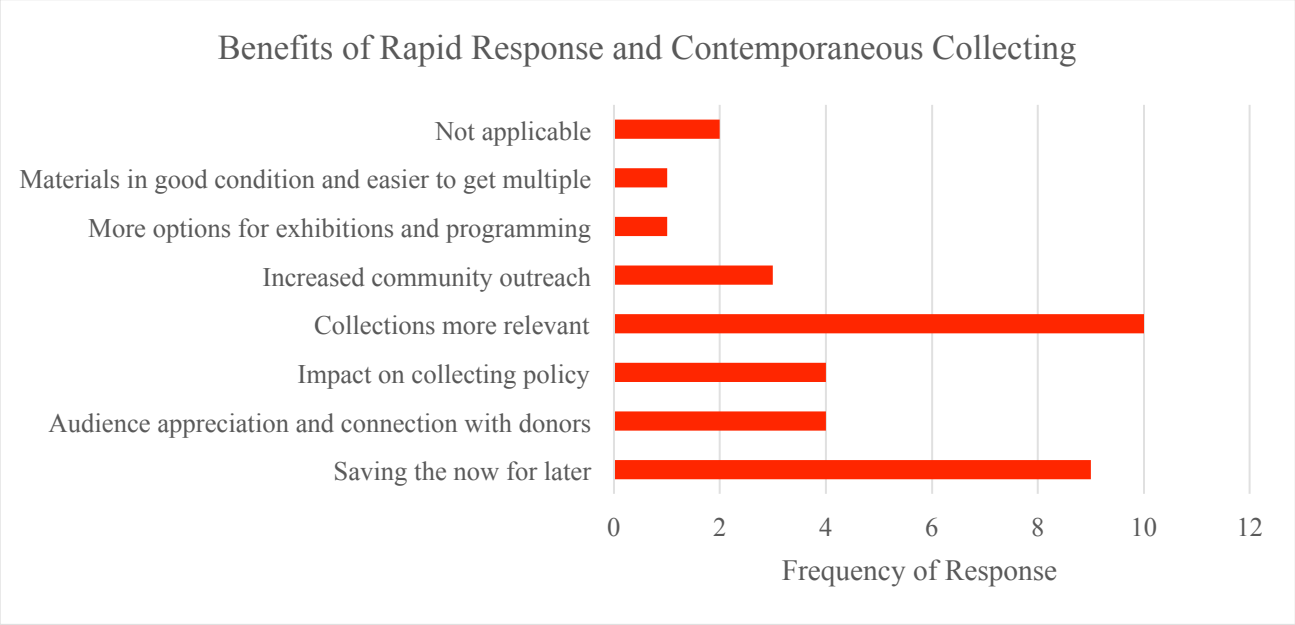
Benefits of Rapid Response and Contemporaneous Collecting

Connection with Community

The advantages of contemporaneous and rapid response collection are very much related to their impact on an institution's programs and exhibitions. (See Figure 10.) The most common advantage of these forms of acquisition is that they make their holdings more relevant to the audiences they serve. It allows museums to connect current events to those of the past and more fully tell the story of their community. Overall, it keeps what they do current. Contemporary collecting of all kinds also promotes inclusivity and engagement: materials of historically underrepresented community groups can influence both the narrative established by the object and attract new visitors. Some institutions also noted audience appreciation of their inclusion of content relevant to events and causes with which they are familiar. Rapid response and contemporaneous collecting expand the content and topics covered in exhibitions and programs. In addition, these materials can be used to connect with audiences on social media. A rural museum in the Midwest highlights specific items in their collection, including contemporary items, in online posts.

[87] Author's survey, 2019.

Figure 10:



Collecting contemporary materials has the capacity to connect museums with new donors and extend relationships with current ones. A professional in the Mid-Atlantic noted how such connections have resulted in more than one donation from multiple individuals, some of whom also suggest other potential donors. An archaeological and anthropological institution in the same region, which no longer collects in this way, previously worked with the creators of pieces "to learn more about their history and the story behind the art."[88] In this way, stronger relationships between museums and community members may be built.

Impact on Institutional Policy

Multiple survey participants noted the various types of impact on their collecting policies as an advantage of contemporary collecting, although the exact impacts differ. In some instances, it has made their collecting more focused. A staff member from a small urban institution in the West noted this benefit, stating that they now "focus more intensely on under-interpreted areas of city life,"

[88] Ibid.

which will ultimately strengthen the objective to more "strongly exemplify the interests of [their] community" and to be more inclusive in their holdings.[89] This approach only applies to the relatively few institutions that already include the topic in their collecting policies. However, another institution, which has not participated in much rapid response collecting thus far, stated that it will likely be addressed when they review their collecting policies and procedures.

Saving the Now for Later

The second most common benefit of contemporary collecting is acquisition before deterioration. Participants noted that a more proactive approach ensures that today's contemporary materials will arrive in (relatively) good condition and survive for future generations. By extension, so, too, will the stories of the events from which they came or societal trends to which they relate. A staff member from a suburban Southeast institution, which collects in the aftermath of natural disasters, remarked that the items they acquired are ephemeral or have "low monetary worth—things people might throw away without realizing their interpretive value." For example, "in [their] collection is a heavily stained t-shirt quickly printed for the clean-up volunteers to wear after Hurricane Ike."[90] If the museum did not save materials like this, they would likely not be considered worth saving by the general population and therefore would not exist in the future. A professional from an urban museum in New England noted not only how items may have been lost if they did not collect them, but also that their "stories might have been forgotten."[91] Treating oral histories as collected materials as well, taking them "in the moment" likely results in more accurate information, as one's memory diminishes over time. By saving the histories, museum staffs are better preparing themselves and their successors to interpret the accompanying items.

[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

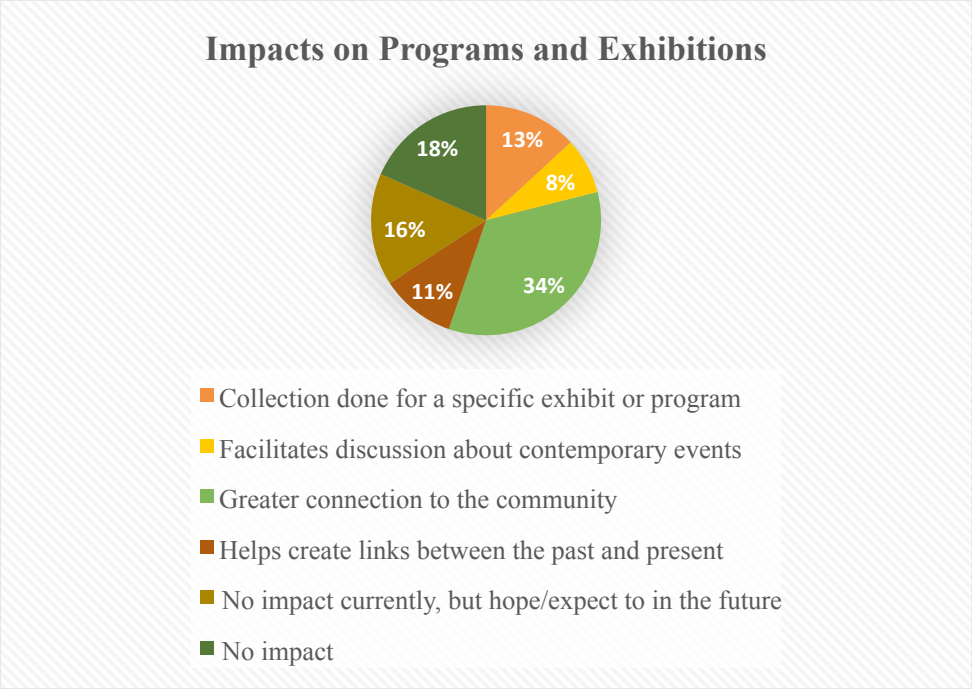
Contemporary items acquired at events are often ephemeral in nature, but this is not necessarily the case with items gathered through rapid response collection. Some contemporary materials arrive in pristine condition, especially when institutions receive them directly from manufacturers. Thanks to mass-production, it is possible to acquire multiple identical pieces. A survey participant from a rural museum in the Midwest said that they are able to obtain more than one of the same item for their research library or education collections.

Impact on Exhibitions and Programming

There are four primary impacts of rapid response and contemporaneous collecting on the institutions that engage in the practices: greater connection to the community, deeper discussions about contemporary events, stronger links between the past and present, and better specific exhibits or programs. Thirty-four percent of responses were related in some way to improved connections with the community. (See Figure 11.) These relationships come in various forms. Staff acquire materials in most cases for their permanent collection directly from community members and some exhibit them soon after. As such, they are often increasingly relatable to visitors. Materials found onsite ensure that holdings and the museum as a whole are more relevant. It can promote better representation of historically underrepresented groups and overlooked topics. At an urban museum on the West coast, for example, it "fills gaps in [their] collection, particularly relating to communities of color and social action. It is a way to connect with people who may not think they are interested in what we do and might not otherwise have anything to do with us."[92] The relevance provided by acquiring contemporary items demonstrates to community members that the museum is an inclusive space for all.

Figure 11:

[92] Ibid.



Staff at some institutions collect contemporary material primarily for the purpose of a specific exhibition or program. Contemporaneous collection in this instance becomes part of the exhibition process. A university museum in suburban New England routinely exhibits artwork by faculty, staff, alumni, and students every 10 years. An urban institution in the Midwest had a small pop-up exhibition on women's history featuring images and a Pussy hat from the 2016 Women's March that was later donated. Exhibitions and programs with such items help foster discussion about associated events. Acquiring contemporary objects from the community allows for more effective discussion of what is happening there as well as regionally, nationally or internationally. It demonstrates that they are "not just a museum of old stuff," as a respondent from the suburban Southeast stated.[93]

Contemporary items provide a connection between the past and present in two key ways. Firstly, they provide increased context for older materials in an organization's holdings,

[93] Ibid.

demonstrating continuity between phases of social movements, such as items from historic women's movements along with those from present-day Women's Marches. Secondly, the inclusion of contemporary objects helps to tell more complete stories, providing comparisons between the historical and the contemporary. A sports team-centered museum in the Midwest has exhibits on historic team stories as well as displays with items from present-day players, which brings all fans together for a "current shared experience."[94]

A total of 34% of respondents noted that rapid response and contemporaneous collecting had no impact on their exhibitions and programs. The relatively high number is likely due to the fairly large amount of respondents working at institutions that do not engage in contemporary collecting, either in the form of rapid response or contemporaneous collecting. However, this was not the case for all respondents reporting no impact; of the 34%, 16% noted that while their institutions had not seen effects as of yet, they either hope or expect to in the future. This may be due to museums just starting to collect contemporary materials or institutions that have collected at very few events and therefore have few items thus far. The fact that some participants said there was no impact at their institution but that they anticipate that to change signals a growing interest in the practice and an openness to its possibilities.

Challenges of Rapid Response and Contemporaneous Collecting

Lack of Space, Staff and Time

Even organizations that actively benefit from acquiring contemporary materials face a variety of challenges in doing so. Somewhat predictably, the most common obstacles align with those that prevent other institutions from undertaking the practice in the first place. The top three challenges are

[94] Ibid.

storage, staff, and time. (See Figure 12). They were mentioned previously in the discussion of why institutions choose not to—or cannot viably—engage in rapid response or contemporaneous collecting. Issues related to staff members were brought up in two ways. They often need to attend events to contemporaneously collect outside of business hours, and there must be sufficient personnel to process and care for the new items. As one museum professional from an urban institution in the Southwest mentioned, acquiring contemporary materials may result in large numbers of ephemera; this is confirmed by the materials commonly collected, as discussed above. Furthermore, many contemporary events can be spontaneous with limited lead time for planning. Museum professionals need to evaluate whether an event and the materials that come from it will (potentially) be appropriate for their institutions. A staff member from a sports-centered institution got to the heart of it, saying, "with golf events all over the world, we cannot be everywhere. We have to be selective about what we choose to collect, otherwise it would be weekly."[95] Selectivity is key to successful contemporaneous collecting.

Donations

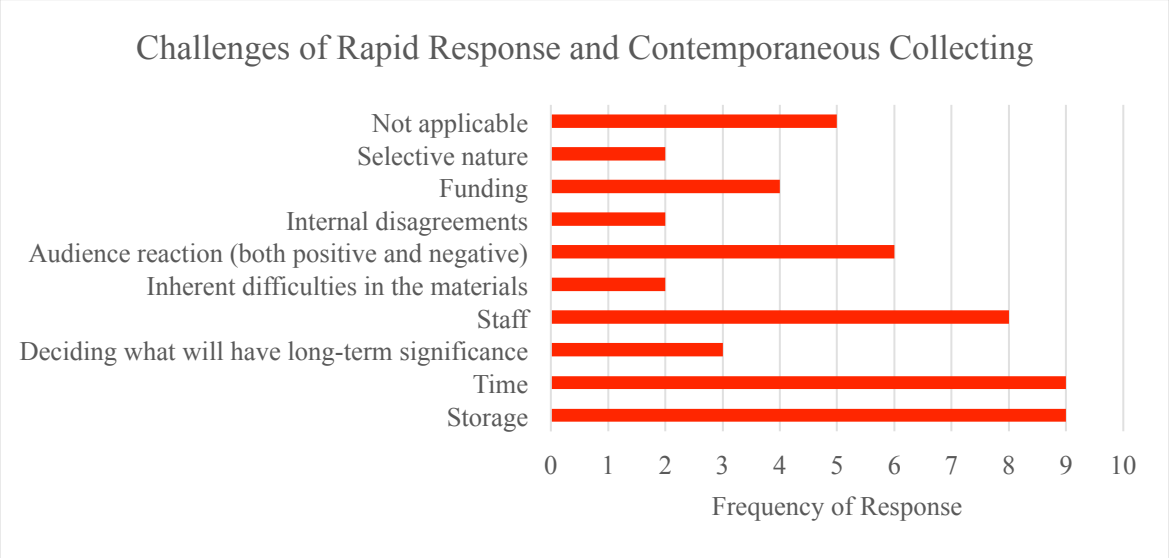
Positive, negative, and indifferent audience responses to contemporaneous collection efforts have each posed their own kinds of challenges with regard to both overeager and uninterested donors. Interesting to note on one end of the spectrum are indifferent community members who do not think of the items engaged with in their daily lives as worthy of collecting. Even when the museum reaches out with a specific request, people are not inclined to donate them. On the other hand, one would not expect challenges to arise from positive audience responses, but in fact it may be possible for community members to be *overly* responsive, offering unwanted items of no interest, including those the museum does not believe are important to acquire or that it already has in

[95] Ibid.

abundance. Donors can be insistent that their materials are unique for one reason or another and deserve to be in the museum's collection. Having an enthusiastic community seems like a positive challenge: people are clearly connecting with the museum with greater frequency and at a new level of involvement. That being said, institutions cannot accept everything they are offered. So how do staff encourage community members to think of what they have as potentially historic and worthy of donation, while also preventing an onslaught of unusable items? While there really is not an easy answer, the plans of one Midwest institution that has had a limited community response to their rapid response collecting efforts is useful to consider. In order to increase interest, they plan to communicate with the community in very precise terms on the scope of the project and goals. Sharing this information with the community may peak people's interest, while also clearly outlining which types of materials are sought.

Despite some negative reactions to contemporaneous and rapid response collecting, overall the response gleaned from museum visitors has been neutral. Notably, not one respondent described their audience as reacting very or somewhat negatively, although both "somewhat" and "very" positive each garnered 25% of responses. How can this be interpreted? In some ways, it reflects the challenge of indifference mentioned previously. It could also signal that residents of a community may not know as much about the practice as professionals do. As such, a neutral reaction could simply reflect a need for improved sharing of information with the public about engagement in the acquisition of contemporary items through both rapid response and contemporaneous collection. The fact that there are only positive responses (besides neutral) is favorable to the collection of contemporary materials.

Figure 12:



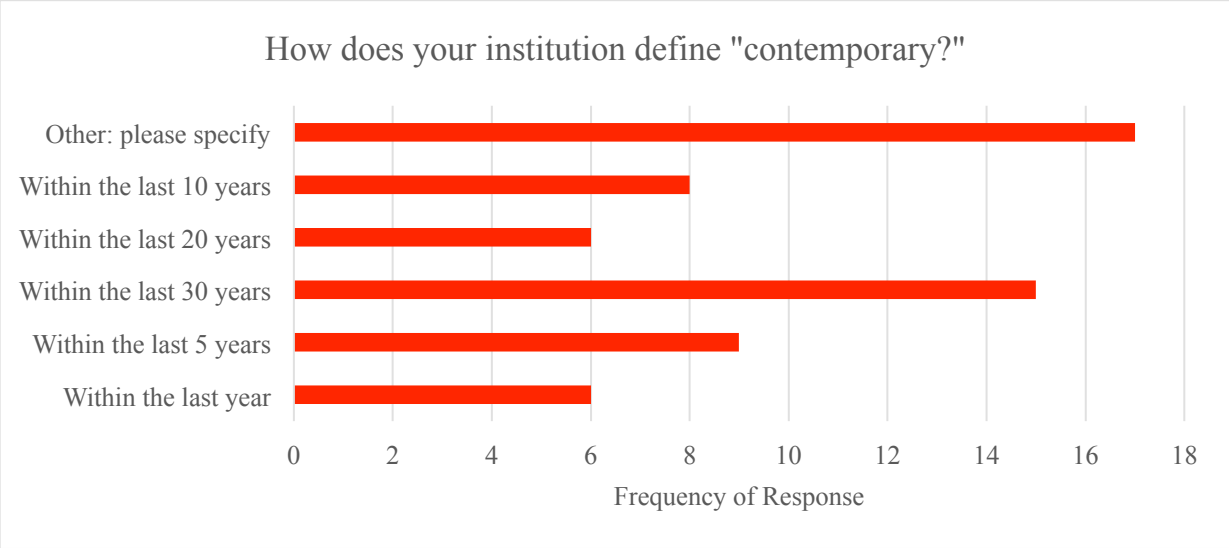
Concepts of History

Negative responses regarding the acquisition of contemporary materials have come from community members as well as staff. Some museums have faced criticism for certain contemporary items accumulated because of their political or generally controversial nature. For example, an institution in the Southeast owns an item that belonged to a notorious serial killer, and some members of the public do not understand why it is there. Elsewhere, locals do not believe that museums should collect materials that are not "history."[96] But this begs the question, what can (or should) be considered "history?" For some, it could even be an event that happened yesterday. The question of what is considered "history" is directly related to another posed in the survey: "how does your institution define contemporary?" The answers varied widely. Although the most common answer (25% of respondents), was "within the last ten years," there were many with both shorter and longer time frames. (See Figure 13.) Some defined it as within the previous year; others considered materials from 1965 as contemporary. Many did not even have a definition. There is no way of

[96] Ibid.

creating a profession-wide standard because it is really dependent on an institution's topic or focus. A disjunction appears, because for many individual community members what constitutes "history" and "contemporary" may seem mutually exclusive; however, in museums this is not the case generally. That being said, similar debates were observed within museums as well, such as differing opinions on collecting practice as well as lack of support from staff and board members about the acquisition of objects that are not considered historical.

Figure 13:



Predicting Relevance

Another difficulty associated with contemporary events is the problem of predicting which will be relevant for future visitors. One survey participant from the rural Midwest described an event considered for contemporaneous collection, which has since proven to not have lasting significance despite preliminary indications otherwise. To address this issue, at another institution in the Southeast some of the acquired materials were catalogued as part of temporary collections, ultimately delaying the decision to fully accession them. This approach allowed more time to evaluate their suitability and durability for the long term. While choosing events to attend is ultimately a guessing game,

based on the cited benefits and positive impacts on exhibitions and programs described above, it is worth the risk.

Collaboration

One somewhat startling result of the survey relates to collaboration with museums and other organizations, or rather the lack of it. Eighty percent of respondents whose institutions engage in contemporaneous collecting said that they have not collaborated with other museums or organizations in doing so. This represents a missed opportunity in multiple respects. For one, museum professionals at an institution having little experience with the practice could reach out to others who do. If staff from multiple institutions go to a single event, collaboration can facilitate the orderly selection of materials. The collective response of local museums following 9/11 in New York provides a good example. The importance of collaboration and further examples of it will be explored in Chapter 5.

The survey ended with a final overarching question: "Do you believe that contemporaneous collecting is a practice that should be pursued more widely by museums?" Responses were overwhelmingly positive. Around 31% said "definitely yes" and 28% said "probably yes." Nonetheless, the most frequent answer was "maybe" at about 33% of respondents, but only 8% said "probably not." What accounts for all of the "maybes?" Notes in the additional comments make important points, with many stating that institutions should only engage in the practice if it fits their mission. A few respondents said that while it does not fit the collecting profile of their institution, it should be undertaken by others. The practice may not be a necessary or even viable practice for all, especially when considering a museum's mission and collecting focus. The practice must be assessed at an institutional level.

This chapter has examined the many benefits and challenges of contemporaneous collecting. It can offer clear advantages for an institution's exhibitions and programs, which in turn can result in improved connection to audiences. Some of the challenges of this practice are associated with the larger issues currently facing museums today—lack of staff, funding, and space—while others are related specifically to this form of collecting: namely how to predict which events will have a long-term impact and the debate about whether objects that are not "history" should be collected. While this chapter revealed the value of contemporaneous collection as related to audience engagement, Chapter 5 will explore ways in which contemporaneous and rapid response collecting connect to the social role of museums.

Chapter 5: Contemporaneous Collection and the Social Role of Museums

The survey results examined in the previous two chapters with regard to the current state of rapid response and contemporaneous collecting in the United States demonstrate that there is much general interest in the practices across the field today, especially among history museums of various foci, regardless of the level of actual participation in them. Interest is largely connected to the benefits that these forms of acquisition provide for increasing the connection to patrons and to the communities at large. As such, it is intricately linked with the active role museums seek to play in society. Are there ways to make these types of collecting more feasible? Chapter 5 will discuss the ways in which contemporaneous collecting enhances the social role of museums and provide recommendations for those undertaking the practice based on survey results.

Development of Professional Standards and Best Practices

The museum profession would benefit from the codification of contemporaneous collecting through the establishment of a standard definition and professional guidelines that could make the practice more systematic. As noted in Chapter 2, the act of going into the "field" to gather materials in this manner is not mentioned in the fifth edition of *Museum Registration Methods* (2010), a manual widely trusted across the profession and often referred to as the registrar's "Bible," both in reviews and in the book's actual description.[97] This omission is surprising considering that institutions were engaging in the practice, albeit infrequently, at least as far back as the early 1900s. There will likely be another edition of the authoritative book in the future, and the term contemporaneous collection—or another term chosen by the author(s) connoting the practice—should be included in the section on institutional acquisition of objects. It could be added to the

[97] "Museum Registration Methods," Goodreads, accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8325250-museum-registration-methods.

section on field collection, as it does involve going into the "field," but it could also have its own category. Incorporating the term in the next edition would bring it into the profession's common vernacular and contribute to the legitimacy of the practice because of the book's extensive use across the field.

Guidelines or standards about collecting in an effective and respectful manner could, and should, also be put together by professional organizations such as the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). The AAM already has "Guidelines" for other collections-related matters as part of their Collections Stewardship Standards.[98] Standards established by a nationwide organization would provide a broad look at how the practice should be undertaken. That being said, as evidenced by survey results, contemporaneous collecting is not applicable for all museum types. Consequently, it may be advisable for type-specific professional organizations such as the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), Association of Academic Museums and Galleries (AAMG), Association of Art Museum Directors, or Oral History Association (OHA) to create guiding principles as well. Those set by the AAM would relate to overall considerations regarding the practice, while creating resources about best practices in more specialized professional organizations would allow for more topical adaptation. Having general and specific guidelines in place that can be easily followed would assist institutions in responding with greater readiness to events and acquire materials more effectively once there.

Some museum professionals have published their own guidelines for event-based collecting. In 2017, Barbara Cohen-Stratyner outlined rules for the documentation of what she refers to as "crowd-collected artifacts."[99] These rules are broken down into five sections: background of the

[98] "Collections Stewardship Standards," American Alliance of Museums, accessed January 20, 2019, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/collections-stewardship-standards/.
[99] Cohen-Stratyner, "What democracy looks like," 88-90.

event itself and how the institution learned about it; images and media; source of artifacts; identifying the information to be discovered from objects; and additional questions regarding a material's preservation needs and its potential use in exhibitions. These principles provide a concise list of what museum professionals should document about materials gathered on site in order to create the most complete record possible about the objects, the event, and the individual institution's involvement. Doing so is important for preserving the provenance of the items collected as well as explaining the rationale for attending the event itself to prevent the duplication of similar ones in the future. Cohen-Stratyner's rules provide excellent questions for staff to ask, and although she writes specifically for events related to political activism, they are relevant to other occasions as well. The profession would benefit from rules like these for natural disasters and other tragedies as well.

While establishing best practices for contemporaneous collecting will benefit the profession at large, the actual gathering of contemporary materials will be unique to each institution. Consequently, individual museums would benefit from naming the practice in their own acquisition policies and including its methodology in procedures. Responses amongst my survey participants highlighted that this is not currently the norm, although contemporaneous collecting is mentioned more often than rapid response collecting. Some museums can function as models for reference. For example, London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London's Collections Development Policy from January 2015 begins with the central role that contemporary materials play at the institution. The policy briefly references materials already acquired in this way, while explaining why they seek contemporary materials and their criteria for selection. The policy also makes it clear that materials they have accumulated in the past "inform" their gathering of new ones.[100] This

[100] "Collections Development Policy: Victoria and Albert Museum," Victoria and Albert Museum, revised January 2015, https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2016/09/29/14/25/43/0ef149fc-de8d-4c49-a29b-eb9fdb171a22/VA-COLLECTIONS-DEVELOPMENT-POLICY-2014-rev1.pdf.

demonstrates a way in which museums can remain relevant and insert themselves into the discourse on political and social issues facing the cities and societies in which they are located, as well as the world at large.

Collaboration

Seeking advice from other organizations is one way in which collaboration serves to benefit in the acquisition of contemporary materials. Cooperation is also possible in the actual collection of materials as well as in the evaluation of exhibitions and programs. There are precedents for cooperation related to contemporaneous collecting, such as the collective effort following the events of September 11, 2001, discussed in Chapter 2. In that case, collaboration among multiple institutions prevented competition for objects and ultimately resulted in a more respectful response with regard to selection as well as communication with survivors and those cleaning up in the aftermath. It is important during any event—be it protest, natural disaster or tragedy—that it never becomes about the museum itself. The ultimate goal of collecting materials is to tell a story and engage with the community. In doing so, staff need to make sure they are not a distraction to participants, taking away from the actual event.[101] This delicate balance was handled very effectively in the aftermath of 9/11.

The often spontaneous nature of contemporaneous collecting might seem to be a roadblock to collaboration among institutions. Indeed, it may not be possible in all situations. On the other hand, increased cooperation could help to prepare institutions for the unexpected. Networks similar to those in Sweden's SAMDOK (1977-2011), previously discussed, could be created.[102] Such a system on

[101] Kathleen Lawther, "How Should Museums Equip Themselves for Rapid Response Collecting?," *Association of Registrars and Collections Specialists (ARCS)*, January 31, 2017, https://www.arcsinfo.org/news-events/entry/2285/how-should-museums-equip-themselves-for-rapid-response-collecting.
[102] Steen, "Samdok: tools to make the world visible," 199-200.

the national level may not be plausible considering the number of museums in the United States, but it would make great sense locally among those with a common interest or collecting focus, for example, those in regions where a certain type of natural disaster like hurricanes is prominent. Because severe weather is increasingly common in certain geographical areas, having a collective plan for how to respond could be beneficial. Staff at experienced institutions can serve as a resource and all involved can work together to create effective practices.

Collaboration need not be limited to arrangements between institutions; organizations such as branches of the military or universities can be leveraged as well. For military museums, materials could be—and in some cases are— acquired during deployment. The National Army Museum in London began doing this following their exhibition *Helmand* in 2007-2008, at which oral history interviews with soldiers as well as video footage and photographs of the front line from cellphones and hand-held cameras were included.[103] The exhibition was created in close partnership with members of the British military. It proved so successful that their collections policy was updated in relation to material from modern conflicts. They continue to receive items from soldiers during deployment including objects, photographs, videos and blogs.[104]

The United States Armed Forces have also collected contemporary material for at least twenty-five years. The Marine Corps in particular has a History and Museums Division with a Field History branch.[105] One respondent to my request for survey participants gathered artifacts and conducted oral history interviews with soldiers as a field historian for the Marine Corps.[106] Materials

[103] Jo Wooley, "Examining Contemporary Conflict," in *Inspiring Action: Museums and Social Change* (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc., 2016), 97-98.
[104] Ibid, 101.
[105] "Marine Corps History and Museums Division, Washington, DC," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, published June 26, 2014, https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/research-guides/source-guide-entry-by-state/district-of-columbia/marine-cops-history-and-museums-division.html.
[106] "Response to: Rapid-Response Collecting in the 21st Century: MA Thesis Survey," *Museum Junction Open Forum*, https://community.aam-us.org/communities/community-

are collected in combat zones as well as during relief efforts; for example, field historians were sent to Haiti following the 2010 earthquake to document Marines assisting in the recovery effort.[107] For institutions with related foci and missions, there is the potential to work with branches of the military and establish official ties to encourage the donation of contemporary materials. Relationships with those directly involved in contemporary conflict will visually improve the stories museums tell about it now and in the future through physical evidence and personal accounts.

Museums could also work with universities. "Art of the March" started by chance as five professors from Northeastern University in Boston saw a plethora of signs propped up against a fence in Boston Commons following the Women's March on January 21, 2017. The group decided to take action upon discovering that city park workers intended to throw them away. They ultimately saved around 6000 signs; photos were taken of each and posted in an online archive.[108] They were later donated to an institution in New York City. This presents a promising possibility for future practice. The fact that members of the university—especially professors and students—digitized the materials presents a great model. The process of digitizing collections is in fact becoming a priority across the museum field, but it is also time consuming. Although this project was undertaken spontaneously, it sets a precedent for museums working with local university professors and students. Institutions with smaller staffs would especially benefit from such assistance in the collection of materials, however, they would still need to do the accessioning themselves.

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home/digestviewer/viewthread?GroupId=31&MessageKey=96e430fb-3163-44b1-8cce-1d1522dac78a&CommunityKey=d34b2dfb-4151-4629-a59a-553d0ae428d9&tab=digestviewer.

[107] Cassandra Brown, "History division preserves, promotes Marine Corps past, present," *Marines*, July 15, 2015. https://www.quantico.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/608782/history-division-preserves-promotes-marine-corps-past-present/

[108] Art of the March, "A Documentary Project," Art of the March, accessed February 4, 2019, http://artofthemarch.boston/page/about.

Museums with similar goals would benefit from collaborative efforts—or at least increased communication—regarding their use of contemporary materials in exhibitions and events. The Curator's Committee of the American Alliance of Museums (CurCom) worked with eight other professional networks in spring 2017 to survey their members' approaches to audience engagement with their collections. They discovered that most institutions develop their programming independently. On the one hand, this results in more unique programs, but on the other it makes the development of best practices virtually unattainable.[109] While this survey focused on the broad use of collections by museums for the public, its results related to the lack of collaboration are helpful in the discussion of contemporaneous collecting practices. Assessing the various methodologies for gathering items on site may open the door to the sharing of ideas and eventually contribute to an industry-wide way of evaluating the practice.

The Social Role of Museums

After discussing ways to make contemporaneous collecting increasingly plausible for more institutions through collaboration and the creation of profession-wide standards, this question begs to be asked: why is acquiring contemporary materials so important? As mentioned in Chapter 4, contemporaneous collecting (and the collection of contemporary materials more generally through rapid-response collecting) provides an excellent way for institutions to connect with their communities. It matters because of the shift in focus within museums generally and their changing role in today's society. Once defined and guided almost exclusively by their collections, museums have become increasingly audience-focused, aimed at educating the public.[110] It is no longer always the prevailing view that objects have an inherent value—instead, "Visitor interest and attention is determined not by an object's inherent appeal but its relevance to their own framework of knowledge

[109] Redmond Barnett, W. James Burns, and Eliza Phelps, "Audience Engagement through Collections" *EXHIBITION* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 102.
[110] Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 28-29.

and experience."[111] Collecting and displaying contemporary materials will help museums to be increasingly relevant to more visitors.

There are differing opinions amongst members in the field on this move from an almost exclusive focus on collections to audiences, from whole-hearted support to skepticism and wariness about the implications of such a shift. Josie Appleton, representing the dissenters, a minority today, asserts in "Museums for 'The People'?" (2001) that when museums put the potential audience at the center of what they do, "the collection will quite naturally lose its importance and value."[112] Others argue that the evolution toward to a more audience-centric outlook does not mean that the collection is any less important. The role it plays is simply reassessed with the belief that collections can be used to improve people's lives as well as the community.[113] For example, several New York City museums such as the Frick Collection hold programs for members of law enforcement to improve visual observation by looking at paintings.[114] Institutions will be better able to serve their community if they have diverse materials to which visitors can relate. Contemporaneous collecting has the potential to appease those who fully support the shift and those who do not.

The collection of contemporary materials through both contemporaneous and rapid response collecting will likely increase the inclusivity and diversity represented in exhibitions and programs. Why are inclusivity and diversity so important? Kevin Jennings, President of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City, summarized the issue by citing lesbian poet Adrienne Rich in his keynote address at the American Alliance of Museums conference in 2018. Jennings quoted Rich stating, "When someone with authority describes the world and you're not in it, there is a moment of

[111] Lisa C. Roberts, "Changing Practices of Interpretation," in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2012), 150.
[112] Josie Appleton, "Museums for 'The People?," in *Museums and Their Communities*, ed. Sheila Watson (New York: Routledge, 2007), 117.
[113] Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 31.
[114] Barnett, Burns, and Phelps, "Audience Engagement through Collections", 99.

psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing."[115] While Rich is referencing her sexual identity, one can argue that her words potentially relate to many historically (and currently) under-represented groups. The role of museums is changing, but they continue to have intellectual authority. If community members do not see themselves represented on a museum's walls, the implication could be harmful. One could argue—and correctly so—that people do not only visit museums in order to see themselves, but also to learn about others. The more cultures that are depicted in the museum, the more individuals will be able to relate, while also learning about other cultures. In order to create both temporary and permanent exhibitions on topics that matter to its visitors, museums must consider what is important to their constituents. In doing so, it positions itself as essential to the community and fosters its ability to make change within it.[116]

Collecting contemporary materials now allows museums to tell a more complete story with regard to popular culture now and in the future. What they choose to acquire makes a statement about that which deserves to be remembered. Collecting materials "means conferring value and institutional memory on them (and by inference the context they represent); not collecting them implies disregard for those memories and contexts."[117] Throughout history, materials relating to groups such as minorities, immigrants, and the non-elite were not amassed, or at least not extensively, in part because items owned by those groups were less durable, and they simply owned fewer things. As such, their stories can be harder to tell or lost all together. Acquiring contemporary materials ensures that the stories of diverse communities within the larger community will be remembered in the future. This increasingly robust form of engagement has the potential to

[115] "AAM 2018 Opening Session & Awards followed by Keynote Speaker - Kevin Jennings," YouTube Video, 1:31:43, posted by "AmericanMuseums," July 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSDV1_ACEcs.
[116] Elizabeth Wood, "Rules for the (R)evolution of Museums," in *Inspiring Action: Museums and Social Change* (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc., 2009), 33.
[117] Suzanne Keene, *Fragments of the World: Uses of Museum Collections* (Burlington, MA: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005), 92.

encourage more diverse groups to donate materials to the museum in the future as well as increase future involvement overall. By leading to greater inclusivity, collecting contemporary materials may encourage more people to believe that museums are for them.

Some worry that collecting materials in the present has the potential to be controversial or, based on the events that are chosen to be attended, that a museum's staff will be seen as having a political bias. But ultimately, museums are not neutral, nor have they ever been. The materials they decide to collect, the programs and exhibitions they present, their allocation of budget, and even the act of remaining silent about controversial topics are all ways in which institutions implicitly state a point of view. LaTanya Autry and Mike Murawski started a campaign in August 2017 called "Museums Are Not Neutral." On Suse Anderson's *Museopunks* podcast, Murawksi said, "Every single institution is based on colonialism and white supremacy and all kind of structures that are in place. And they have not been able to escape those structures."[118] Reinforcing inclusion is just one way American institutions can begin to challenge these structures. In addition, many museums are increasingly meant to be places of discourse where people come together. Materials can provide a starting point for dialogue about controversial topics, both historical and current. As such, this is relevant to a broad range of institutions, most specifically history museums of varying emphases, but also to others such as art and science museums. Museums have the potential to serve as safe spaces for discussing controversial topics constructively, where visitors feel comfortable enough to engage with one another and the content.[119]

This chapter has investigated ways to make contemporaneous collecting a more plausible endeavor, and to explain why it is important to do so based on the shift from object-focused to

[118] LaTanya Autry and Mike Murawski, "#MuseumsAreNotNeutral," interview with Suse Anderson, *Museopunks,* podcast, audio, June 28, 2018, https://www.aam-us.org/2018/06/28/museopunks-episode-27-museumsarenotneutral/.
[119] Barbara Schaffer Bacon, Pam Korza, and Patricia E. Williams, "Giving Voice: A Role for Museums in Civic Dialogue," *A Museums & Community Toolkit* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2002), 14.

audience-focused institutions that is underway in the field today. The practice can be made more manageable through collaboration, whether with other museums or similar institutions, universities, the military, and other community organizations, as well as through the creation of nationwide and more specialized standards. The acquisition of contemporary materials has the potential to increase diversity and inclusion in museum collections as well as in the stories that are told using them within institutions, now and in the future.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The acquisition of contemporary materials, whether through contemporaneous collecting or through more conventional forms of rapid response collecting, poses challenges for museums. These difficulties, however, are ultimately outweighed by the benefits of increased engagement with the public through socially responsive exhibitions and programs and the diversification of representation. Institutions with missions that lend themselves to this type of collection, specifically history museums of varying foci, should strongly consider doing so. The practice of gathering contemporary materials, especially through contemporaneous collecting, is becoming more common in the 21st century. It presents a radically different type of acquisition than had been the norm since the founding of museums, because it requires staff to react in "real time" to what is happening in their communities as opposed to waiting for items to be donated or purchased. The objects thus acquired, such as t-shirts, posters, computers, sports equipment, photographs and other ephemera, provide a more complete understanding of society as a whole.

Unsurprisingly, the most common reasons given by those who are unable to engage in contemporaneous collection are lack of staff, funding, and space, which mirror the challenges faced by those who do. Institutions that pursue the practice anyway report that its benefits are significant: making a museum's holdings more relevant to visitors and saving materials that may not survive otherwise. Contemporaneous collection would become more accessible to more organizations through collaboration and the creation of profession-wide and specialized standards. The shifting focus from collection to audience taking place at many museums necessitates this approach and provides a way of keeping both at center stage.

So where can research on this topic go from here? My survey participants represented institutions of varying size from all regions of the country and a wide variety of thematic foci. Much

was gleaned from the responses. However, its sample size was small compared to the number of museums throughout the United States. Thus, it is not completely representative of the current state and future direction of rapid response and contemporaneous collecting. A larger survey involving significantly more respondents might be the next logical step for continued research on the topic. That being said, the survey designed for this paper still proved effective for demonstrating the benefits and challenges of the practice as well as the ways in which different institutions actually go about engaging in the practice. The acquisition of contemporary items through contemporaneous collecting and their use in exhibitions and programs now and in the future presents an exciting opportunity for museums of all types to tell more diverse, inclusive and historically authentic stories.

Appendix

Appendix A: Survey: Rapid-Response Collecting in the 21st Century

This survey will address the topic of "rapid-response collecting," that is, the collecting of contemporary materials. While some materials of this nature enter the collection through donation or purchase, this survey focuses on what I refer to as "contemporaneous collecting," meaning museum professionals attending events such as rallies, protests, and marches to collect materials for their collections. My purpose is to better understand the practice and its implications for museums.

In the survey, "rapid-response collecting" refers to all collection of contemporary material whether through donation, purchase, or field collection, while "contemporaneous collecting" refers specifically to field collection. Thank you for your participation.

1. **What best describes the location of your museum?**
    - **a.** Urban
    - **b.** Suburban
    - **c.** Rural
2. **How would you describe the part of the country where your museum is located?**
    - **a.** New England
    - **b.** Mid-Atlantic
    - **c.** Midwest
    - **d.** Southeast
    - **e.** Southwest
    - **f.** West
3. **How many full-time staff does your institution have?**
    - **a.** 1-5
    - **b.** 6-15
    - **c.** 16-30
    - **d.** 31-50
    - **e.** 51-70
    - **f.** 71-100
    - **g.** 101-150
    - **h.** 151-200
    - **i.** More than 200
4. **What is the collecting focus of your institution? _____**
5. **Name of institution (optional): _____**
6. **How does your institution define "contemporary?"**
    - **a.** Within the last year
    - **b.** Within the last 5 years
    - **c.** Within the last 10 years
    - **d.** Within the last 20 years
    - **e.** Within the last 30 years
    - **f.** Other→please specify: _____
7. **Does your museum currently engage in rapid-response collecting?**

a. Yes
b. No
c. We have in the past but it is not currently a point of emphasis for us
d. Not currently, but we plan to in the future

8. **Does your museum currently engage in contemporaneous collecting?**
   a. Yes
   b. Yes, pending the event.
   c. No
   d. We have in the past but it is not currently a point of emphasis for us
   e. Not currently, but we plan to in the future
9. **If your museum does not engage in rapid-response collection, why not?** ***(Select all that apply)***
   a. Does not fit our collecting profile
   b. Lack of space
   c. Lack of funding
   d. Lack of staff
   e. Lack of time
   f. Other: _____
10. **If your museum does not contemporaneously collect, why not?** ***(Select all that apply)***
    a. Does not fit our collecting profile
    b. Lack of space
    c. Lack of funding
    d. Lack of staff
    e. Lack of time
    f. Other: _____
11. **Is rapid response collecting addressed in your institution's collecting policy?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not currently, but we are working on adding it
12. **Is "contemporaneous collecting" addressed your institution's collecting policy?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not currently, but we are working on adding it
13. **At how many events has your museum at collected overall?**
    a. None
    b. 1 –10
    c. 11 – 20
    d. 21 – 30
    e. More than 30→how many? _____
14. **How does your institution decide at which events to attend and collect materials?**
15. **Approximately how many items in your collection have been collected through rapid-response collection?**
    a. 0-100

b. 100-300
c. 301-500
d. 501-700
e. 701-900
f. Over 901→ How many: _____

16. Approximately how many items collected through rapid-response collecting were through contemporaneous collection specifically?
a. 0-100
b. 101-300
c. 301-500
d. 501-700
e. 701-900
f. Over 901→ How many: _____

17. What is your criteria for deciding what to collect at events?

18. If your institution engages in contemporaneous collecting, have you ever collaborated with other museums or organizations?
a. Yes
b. No

19. How has the response from your community been to collecting materials in this way?
a. Very Negative
b. Somewhat negative
c. Neutral
d. Somewhat positive
e. Very positive

20. How does rapid-response collecting, and contemporaneous collecting more specifically, impact the exhibitions and programs put on by your institution?

21. When engaging in "contemporaneous collecting," how much time is typically spent actively selecting materials?
a. Hours
b. Days
c. Weeks

22. Do you believe that contemporaneous collecting will necessitate an increase in deaccessioning in the future?
a. Definitely yes
b. Probably yes
c. May or may not
d. Probably not
e. Definitely not

23. What have been the benefits of "rapid-response collecting," as well as "contemporaneous collecting" more specifically at your institution?

24. What challenges has your institution experienced related to "rapid-response collecting," as well as "contemporaneous collecting" more specifically?

25. Do you believe that contemporaneous collecting is a practice that should be pursued more widely by museums?

- **a.** Definitely yes
- **b.** Probably yes
- **c.** Maybe
- **d.** Probably not
- **e.** Definitely not

26. Any other comments?

End of Survey

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Title
From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in Archives

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From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives

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RÉSUMÉ Une grande partie des discussions récentes dans le domaine des études archivistiques au sujet de la justice sociale ont adopté un cadre légaliste axé sur les droits pour définir le rôle des documents, des centres d'archives et des archivistes tant dans les questions de violations des droits humains que pour tenir les individus et les gouvernements responsables quant aux questions des droits humains de base, tels le droit à la vie, à la vie privée et à la liberté d'expression. Pourtant, depuis des décennies les écrits scientifiques féministes ont mis en doute l'universalité d'un cadre axé sur les droits, affirmant plutôt que l'éthique de la sollicitude est un modèle plus inclusif et plus pertinent pour envisager et mettre en place une société plus juste. Cet article propose le changement du modèle théorique dont se servent les archivistes et les spécialistes en études archivistiques pour répondre aux questions de justice sociale – remplaçant celui basé sur les droits individuels par celui basé sur l'éthique féministe. Dans l'approche d'éthique féministe, les archivistes sont perçus comme gardiens responsables, liés aux créateurs de documents, aux sujets, aux utilisateurs et aux communautés grâce à un réseau de liens de responsabilités qui sont mutuellement affectifs. Cet article propose quatre changements inter-reliés dans ces rapports archivistiques, basés sur une empathie radicale.

ABSTRACT Much recent discussion about social justice in archival studies has assumed a legalistic, rights-based framework to delineate the role of records, archives, and archivists in both the violation of human rights and in holding individuals and governments accountable for basic human rights, such as the right to life, privacy, and freedom of expression. Yet decades of feminist scholarship have called into question the universality of a rights-based framework, arguing instead that an ethics of care is a more inclusive and apt model for envisioning and enacting a more just society. This article proposes a shift in the theoretical model used by archivists and archival studies scholars to address social justice concerns – from that based on individual rights to a model based on feminist ethics. In a feminist ethics approach, archivists are seen as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility. This article proposes four interrelated shifts in these archival relationships, based on radical empathy.

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Introduction: Shifting the Conversation

On a recent visit to a self-described "human rights archives" at a major research university, the first author of this article was told that users of the collections comprised almost exclusively employees of the human rights organizations that created the records, along with lawyers and scholars. When asked if survivors of the human rights abuse being documented or local members from those refugee and immigrant communities affected by the described abuse use the records, the administrator giving the tour responded that they are not really the "target audience." This oversight (constituting, one might argue, a failure of archival outreach) is not uncommon for mainstream archives. Even those archives that explicitly articulate a human rights or social justice mission typically frame their work in terms of ensuring a set of individual legal rights, i.e., documenting when such rights have been violated in order to provide evidence for legal redress. Yet a rights-based framework is not the only way we could approach archival ethics. In this article, we articulate a contrasting approach, informed by feminist ethics, that centres on radical empathy and obligations of care. In this particular case, we argue, an archival approach marked by radical empathy would require archives to make survivors and implicated communities not just a target group of users, but central focal points in all aspects of the archival endeavour, from appraisal to description to provision of access.[1] In this case, an ethics of care would transform the reading room space from a cold, elitist, institutional environment to an affective, user-oriented, community-centred service space.

This article proposes a shift in the theoretical model archivists and archival studies scholars use to address social justice concerns – from one based on individual rights to a model based on a feminist ethics of care. From the approach of a feminist ethics of care, archivists are seen as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility. Drawing from the authors' own personal and professional experiences, this article explicates the concept of radical empathy as a component of a feminist ethical framework. It then proposes four interrelated shifts in archival relationships based on radical empathy: the relationship between archivists and records creators, between archivists and records subjects, between archivists and records users, and between archivists and larger communities. In each of these relationships, we argue that archivists have *affective responsibilities* to other parties and posit that these affective

1 Michelle Caswell, "Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Records Documenting Human Rights Abuse: Lessons from Community Archives," *Archival Science* 14, no. 3–4 (October 2014): 307–22.

responsibilities should be marked by *radical empathy*, the "ability to understand and appreciate another person's feelings, experience, etc."[2]

In the archival realm, we posit that empathy is radical if we allow it to define archival interactions even when our own visceral affective responses are steeped in fear, disgust, or anger. Such empathy is radical if it is directed precisely at those we feel are least worthy, least deserving of it. This notion of radical empathy builds on Verne Harris's Derridean insistence that we invite "the other" into the archives, that we let hospitality guide our archival interventions.[3] However, the four shifts we are positing underscore how archival relationships are essentially affective in nature and that archivists have ethical responsibilities based on these affective relationships.

In proposing these relational shifts, this article asks the following questions: How would the archival conversation change if we shifted from a rights-based model toward a feminist ethics of care? What if we began to see archivists not only as guardians of the authenticity of the records in their collections, but also as centrepieces in an ever-changing web of responsibility through which they are connected to the records' creators, the records' subjects, the records' users, and larger communities? What happens when we scratch beneath the surface of the veneer of detached professionalism and start to think of record-keepers and archivists less as sentinels of accountability (or accomplices in human rights violations on the other, and less acknowledged, end of the spectrum) and more as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual responsibility? Furthermore, what if each of these four relationships – archivist and record creator, archivist and record subject, archivist and record user, and archivist and community – was marked by radical empathy?

In asking and answering these questions, this article employs theory building as a methodology. Theory building is the "systematic building and exposition of new theory, drawing on existing theories, concepts, or models … characterized by reflection, deep thought, and a process of gestation of ideas."[4] This discussion also draws on feminist epistemologies that place value in lived experience; as such, we draw on our own personal experiences as humans, archivists, and archival studies scholars. Furthermore, while we conceive of this treatment specifically in relation to records that document violence, trauma, and marginalization, it is also widely applicable. In line with social

2 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2014, s.v. "empathy." Selman Sevenhuijsen, "The Place of Care: The Relevance of the Feminist Ethic of Care for Social Policy," *Feminist Theory* 4, no. 2 (August 2003): 179–97.

3 Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007).

4 Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, "Building an Infrastructure for Archival Research," *Archival Science* 4, no. 3–4 (2004): 149–97.

justice aims, our approach advocates critical attention to power differentials throughout these processes. Given the attempt of feminist ethics to recuperate elements of human experience that have been dismissed or derided as feminine, it is perhaps unsurprising that all four of the relational shifts we are proposing invoke affect in ways that have not yet been commonly discussed in archival studies literature.

Social Justice and Archives

Scholars of archival studies and archivists have rightfully paid increasing attention to social justice concerns in recent years.[5] This literature has shown that archives have the capacity to produce and to reproduce social justice and injustice through their constructions of the past, engagements in the present,[6] and shaping of possible futures. Drawing on a large and interdisciplinary literature in their project on the social justice impacts of archives, Wendy Duff, Andrew Flinn, Karen E. Suurtamm, and David A. Wallace conceptualize social justice as the

> ideal vision that every human being is of equal and incalculable value, entitled to shared standards of freedom, equality, and respect. These standards also apply to broader social aggregations such as communities and cultural groups. Violations of these standards must be acknowledged and confronted. It specifically draws attention to inequalities of power and how they manifest in institutional arrangements and systemic inequities that further the interests of some groups at the expense of others in the distribution of material goods, social benefits, rights, protections, and opportunities. Social justice is always a process and can never be fully achieved.[7]

5 See The Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI), Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (PACG), "Educating for the Archival Multiverse," *American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 69–101; Anne Gilliland, "Neutrality, Social Justice and the Obligations of Archival Education and Educators in the Twenty-First Century," *Archival Science* 11, no. 3–4 (November 2011): 193–209; Michelle Caswell, Giso Broman, Jennifer Kirmer, Laura Martin, and Nathan Sowry, "Implementing a Social Justice Framework in an Introduction to Archives Course: Lessons from Both Sides of the Classroom," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 8, no. 2 (2012): 1–30; Michelle Caswell, "Not Just between Us: A Riposte to Mark Greene," in "Letters to the Editor," *American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 605–8; Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives in the Fight against Symbolic Annihilation," *Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (November 2014): 26–37; and Randall Jimerson, "Archivists and Social Responsibility: A Response to Mark Greene," *American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 335–45.

6 Wendy M. Duff, Andrew Flinn, Karen Emily Suurtamm, and David A. Wallace, "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation," *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (December 2013): 319.

7 Ibid., 324–25.

A social justice agenda in archives requires undertaking critical analyses of power, its operation, distribution, and abuses; working toward equity in the distribution of resources and opportunities[8]; building and maintaining cross-cultural collaboration and dialogue[9]; advocating the inclusion of and promoting the agency of marginalized individuals and communities in the archives[10]; and reinterpreting archival concepts[11] to challenge dominant power structures in support of social justice principles and goals.

Much of the discussion of social justice in the archival field has assumed a legalistic, rights-based framework, to delineate the role of records, archives, and archivists in both the violation of human rights and in holding individuals and governments accountable for basic human rights, such as the right to life, privacy, and freedom of expression.[12] In the majority of this archival studies scholarship, records are seen as tools of *legal* accountability, and both archivists and users are constructed as autonomous individual subjects. As David Wallace and Verne Harris have each noted, in some dominant strands of this scholarship, archivists everywhere are seen to be beholden to universal codes of ethics, and users are treated the same, regardless of their relationship to the act being documented in the record.[13] Although a rights-based approach has been useful in examining some of the most egregious atrocities, such as genocide and mass rape, it ignores the realities of more subtle, intangible, and shifting forms of oppression that are also pressing social justice concerns. The proposed care ethics framework sits firmly within the social justice tradition in archival studies even as it critiques and shifts it; in particular, the concerns over power differentials and inequities that are central to social justice–oriented scholarship guide our theoretical framework and commitment to critical praxis.

An Ethics of Care

Decades of feminist scholarship have called into question the universality of a rights-based framework, arguing instead that such approaches fail to take into account women's experiences of morality. Philosopher Alison Jagger, for

8 Anthony W. Dunbar, "Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started," *Archival Science* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 117.

9 Ibid.

10 Ricardo L. Punzalan and Michelle Caswell, "Critical Directions for Archival Approaches to Social Justice," *Library Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (January 2016): 25–42.

11 Ibid.

12 This legalistic framework is reflected in the first author's prior work. This article does not mean to invalidate such work but to supplement it.

13 David Wallace, "Locating Agency: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Professional Ethics and Archival Morality," *Journal of Information Ethics* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 172–89; Verne Harris, "Jacques Derrida Meets Nelson Mandela: Archival Ethics at the Endgame," *Archival Science* 11, no. 1–2 (March 2011): 113–24.

example, noted that traditional discussions of ethics failed women in five overlapping ways: disregarding issues that impact women, devaluing the private realm, positing that women are less moral than men, overvaluing traits that have been constructed as masculine, and privileging rights over relationships.[14] As Jagger's typology reveals, the feminist critique of dominant conceptions of morality takes many different forms, as do formulations of what constitutes a "feminist ethics" in response. Although "feminist ethics" is a wide net that catches many different (and sometimes incompatible) strands of thought, we have chosen here to focus on an ethics of care as a feminist framework.

Faced with the predominance of rights-based models, some feminist scholars have argued instead that an "ethics of care" is a more inclusive and apt model for envisioning and enacting a more just society. An ethics of care, which we situate here under the larger tent of feminist ethics, stresses the ways people are linked to each other and larger communities through webs of responsibilities.[15] This feminist approach to ethics emphasizes "particularity, connection, and context" rather than abstract moral principles.[16] It rejects liberal moral assumptions about individual choice and free will – which it posits is not how most women have experienced the world – in favour of empathy in the face of situational demands, and it draws to the fore women's lived experiences as caregivers.

The framework of an ethics of care emerged, in part, from the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan, whose 1982 book *In a Different Voice* questioned dominant theories of morality in which ethics were seen as matters of individual choice and free will. In such scholarship, Gilligan argued, "Men's experience stands for all of human experience," resulting in "theories which eclipse the lives of women and shut out women's voices."[17] In the face of such masculinist scholarship, Gilligan engaged in the radical act of listening to women. What she heard was that dominant rhetorics of autonomy, individual freedoms and rights, choice, and neutrality were meaningless to many women, who are *socialized* into a caregiving role and whose moral decision-making is deeply relational, context dependent, and emotionally resonant.

We want to stress here the word *socialized*, and caution against reductive claims that essentialize women as biologically prone to caring; that is not the underlying tenet of this strand of feminist ethics, nor is it the assumption or

14 Alison Jagger, "Feminist Ethics," in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. L. Becker and C. Becker (New York: Garland Press, 1992), 363–64.

15 See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Claudia Card, *Feminist Ethics* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1991). Eve Browning Cole and Susan Coultrap-McQuin, eds., *Explorations in Feminist Ethics* (Bloomington, IN, and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992); and Elizabeth Frazer, Jennifer Hornsby, and Sabrina Lovibond, *Ethics: A Feminist Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992).

16 Cole and Coultrap-McQuin, *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*, 3.

17 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, xiii.

assertion of this article. Instead, feminist ethics overturns dominant assumptions about the universality of masculinist conceptions of morality and, as articulated by Gilligan, advocates that we all pay greater attention to care – what it is, who does it, who needs it, how it is distributed and circulated – and that we place care at the centre of our moral constructions.[18] Feminist ethics, in our estimation, also problematizes neo-liberalist rhetoric that sees individuals primarily as free agents in a market economy, that deflects attention from systemic oppressions, that posits chronic underfunding, disaster, and state failure as excuses for privatization, and that obfuscates or renders invisible forms of labour that are deemed undesirable.[19]

As opposed to a human rights framework that endows individuals with universal and inalienable rights, a feminist ethics framework posits interlacing and ongoing relationships of mutual obligation that are dependent on culture and context. While in a human rights framework individuals are held accountable by a rationally derived set of laws by states and international governing bodies, in a feminist ethics framework subjects are constructed relationally, intersecting structures of violence are interrogated, and injustice is viewed as both structural and "multi-scalar," that is, operating on both the micro and the macro levels, in private and in public.[20]

Furthermore, while human rights frameworks can often rely on punitive approaches that have the incarceration of perpetrators as an end goal, some feminist frameworks advocate restorative models that aim to reintegrate violators into communities and to re-establish mutually responsive relationships. In particular, women of colour feminist scholarship on, and involvement in, the prison abolition movement has drawn attention to structural racism underlying the prison industrial complex and has questioned the ethics of putting people in cages, regardless of the severity of the offence.[21] Here, we are inspired by transgender legal scholar and activist Dean Spade's assertion that, when it

18 See Cheryl McEwan and Michael K. Goodman, "Place Geography and the Ethics of Care: Introductory Remarks on the Geographies of Ethics, Responsibility and Care," *Ethics, Place and Environment* 13, no. 2 (June 2010): 103–12; Fiona Robinson, "Global Care Ethics: Beyond Distribution, Beyond Justice," *Journal of Global Ethics* 9, no. 2 (August 2013): 131–43; and Virginia Held, "The Ethics of Care as Normative Guidance: Comment on Gilligan," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 107–15.

19 Held, "The Ethics of Care as Normative Guidance."

20 Robinson, "Global Care Ethics."

21 See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, rev. ed. (New York: The New Press, 2012). This work stands in contrast to what has been termed "carceral feminism," that is, feminist work that advocates stiffer prison sentences for those found guilty of sexual violence and hate crimes. See also Victoria Law, "Against Carceral Feminism," *Jacobin* 2014, accessed 8 February 2015, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/10/against-carceral-feminism.

comes to liberation, the law has limits; we cannot simply distill social justice into a series of legal rights granted – however grudgingly – from the state.[22] Indeed, state institutions have historically been and continue to be the biggest purveyors of systems of violence both locally and globally. Instead of relying on governmental and intergovernmental bodies to enforce human rights with the threats of incarceration and militarism, we are advocating a feminist conception of ethics built around notions of relationality, interdependence, embodiment, and responsibility to others.

Radical Empathy and the Body

Empathy is an affective demand of care. Empathy at its most simplistic asks us to imagine our body in the place of another. As a clinical tool, according to psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, "empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person."[23] In philosophy, Karsten Stueber has developed dual conceptions of empathy. The first, "basic empathy," is the human capacity to perceive another's emotional state without simulating or modelling it. In contrast, in "re-enactive empathy"[24] cognitive resources are consciously deployed to reconstruct another person's experience. While helpful, these traditional concepts of empathy are alone not enough in building an ethics of care in archives; for this, we must enact new and radical forms of empathy.

"Radical empathy" has been employed in a range of contexts to describe theoretical and observed relations between people, the self, and others. In her ethnographic work on learning within the psyche and the place of the body in spiritual transformation and healing, anthropologist Joan D. Koss-Chioino argues that empathy in healing relationships "creates an inter-subjective space where individuals," regardless of their prior relationships to one another, enter into "intimate relation." In its extreme form, "individual differences are melded into one field of feeling and experience," a phenomenon Koss-Chioino describes as "radical empathy."[25] Radical empathy is thus a learned process of direct and deep connection between the self and another that emphasizes human commonality through "thinking and feeling into the minds of others."[26] Applying a feminist framework, sociologist Lorraine Nencel calls for adopting a politics of "radical empathy" as a relation that increases compassion,

22 Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of the Law* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011).

23 Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?* ed. Arnold Goldberg with the collaboration of Paul E. Stepansky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 82.

24 Karsten Stueber, *Rediscovering Empathy: Agency, Folk Psychology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2006), 20–21.

25 Joan D. Koss-Chioino, "Spiritual Transformation, Relation and Radical Empathy: Core Components of the Ritual Healing Process," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 43, no. 4 (December 2006): 655–56.

26 Ibid., 664.

the sharing of social capital, and empathic demonstrations of the experiences, needs, and wants of all research collaborators in feminist fieldwork practices.[27] In this context, radical empathy requires closeness between researcher and subject, and that the researcher be fully attuned to the complexities of the research context. In theatre studies, radical empathy has been used to describe popular theatre practices that create a space for individuals and social groups to work on "dangerous issues" by having their stories told and heard, all while recognizing the dangers of storytelling and the inequalities of risk regarding differences in power in the process.[28] The concept of radical empathy has also been taken up in philosophy by Matthew Ratcliffe to describe a distinct kind of empathy emerging out of a phenomenological stance that opens the possibility of structurally different ways of finding oneself in the world.[29] Ratcliffe argues that, while we recognize the differences between our experiences and those of others in everyday encounters, we still take much for granted as shared. He posits that a shift to radical empathy is required to make interpretable and illegible the changes that occur in the structure of human experience in psychiatric illnesses, such as severe depression, schizophrenia, and depersonalization. Radical empathy offers a way to engage with others' experiences that involves discarding the assumption that we share with them the same modal space of belonging in the world. Our conception of empathy is radical in its openness and its call for a willingness to be affected, to be shaped by another's experiences, without blurring the lines between the self and the other.

The notion of empathy we are positing assumes that subjects are embodied, that we are inextricably bound to each other through relationships, that we live in complex relations to each other infused with power differences and inequities, and that we care about each other's well-being. This emphasis on empathy takes bodies and the bodily into account. Bodies and care are intimately linked. Care includes both the often bodily labours of providing what is necessary for the health, sustainment, and protection of someone or something, and the feeling of concern and attachment that provokes such acts. Though bodies and care are often linked in other professional and academic contexts (such as nursing and social work), in archives this attention to the body marks a new strain of inquiry. In prior archival scholarship, acts of care and the bodies they invoke are often ignored outside of purely practical concerns, such as the leaving of oily fingerprints on the surface of photographs and the standard job

27 Lorraine Nencel, "Situating Reflexivity: Voices, Positionalities and Representations in Feminist Ethnographic Texts," *Women's Studies International Forum* 43 (March 2014): 81–82.

28 Shauna Butterwick and Jan Selman, "Deep Listening in a Feminist Popular Theatre Project: Upsetting the Position of Audience in Participatory Education," *Adult Education Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (November 2003): 10.

29 Matthew Ratcliffe, "Phenomenology as a Form of Empathy," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 55, no. 5 (October 2012): 474–95.

requirement of the ability to lift 40 pounds or more.[30] We hope to change this line of thinking by revealing that bodies and the bodily are integral – rather than intrusive or unwanted – aspects of archival labour.

Acknowledging the Limits of Empathy

Even as we propose these affective shifts, we are also sensitive to their limits. Radical empathy holds great potential, but it also presents the possibility of grave danger for archives and archivists. If not carefully negotiated, empathy can easily become problematic in its potential erasure of the other. Literary scholar Saidiya Hartman's work on representations of the suffering of enslaved black bodies presented by 19th-century white abolitionists to garner support for their cause provides an illustration of the dangers of an empathy that requires a substitution of one body for another. In the scenario described by Hartman, "the white body must be positioned in the place of the black body" in order to make black slaves' suffering "visible and intelligible" to the white listener.[31] This replacing of bodies, of black with white, naturalizes suffering and pain as the condition of black bodies,[32] threatens to obliterate the suffering of the black body, erases meaningful differences between bodies, and always returns the focus to the white body and its affective experiences.[33] In this way, Hartman provides us with necessary cautions that highlight the limitations of empathy about which we must always be vigilant.

In the midst of this call for empathy, it is also important to remind ourselves not to erase differences between bodies, not to turn a blind eye to power differentials, and not to reinforce hierarchies that permanently position some as caregivers and others as care recipients. Here, Selma Sevenhuijsen's caution against the paternalism of "rescuer and victim" mentalities is key, as is her assertion that relationships between caregiver and care recipient are marked by an "asymmetrical reciprocity" that acknowledges inequalities of power within such relationships.[34] Thus, while we may empathize with others, we must simultaneously engage differences between self and other. Sevenhuijsen writes, "The ethical relation begins with the willingness to be open to everyone's unique, embodied subjectivity: the idea that everyone is positioned differently and cannot be reduced to that of others."[35] Similarly,

30 Marika Cifor, "Harvey Milk's Ponytail: The Affect of Intimacy in the Queer Archives" (presentation, Affect and the Archive symposium, University of California, Los Angeles, 20 November 2014).
31 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18–19.
32 Ibid.
33 Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 100–101.
34 Sevenhuijsen, "The Place of Care," 186.
35 Ibid.

work in the phenomenological philosophical tradition critiques conceptions of empathy that require such first-person replication of others' experiences, the imagining of our body in the place of another. For example, Edith Stein uses "empathy" more broadly to encompass all "acts in which foreign experience is comprehended."[36] This type of empathy is never about having the same feeling as another; rather it is through empathy that we have an experience of our own that "announces" another experience as belonging to someone else.[37] As these dangers have shown, we must be careful not to appropriate the experiences of others under the guise of empathy in our archival endeavours; instead, empathy can be used to mark the distinction between self and others even as we open ourselves to them. In this way, the possibility of feeling through another with empathy can open possibilities for complex and multiple affinities. If carefully negotiated, empathy allows for a better understanding of others and their positions, while also allowing us to be aware of the connections and disjunctions between the self and the other.

Shifting Affective Responsibilities in the Archives

Now that we have described the differences between a rights-based approach and a feminist ethics framework, and have explained the importance of care, empathy, and the body in the latter, as well as the potential pitfalls of such an approach, we would like to propose how a feminist approach would shift four key archival relationships: the relationship between archivist and record creator, between archivist and record subject, between archivist and user, and between archivist and larger communities. In each of these relationships, we are advocating that archivists adopt an affective responsibility toward radical empathy.

First affective responsibility: the relationship between archivist and record creator. A relationship of radical empathy here would mean that we see the archivist as entering into an affective bond with the creator of the record she is stewarding. This bond exists, even if the archivist and record creator have never met in person, even if centuries separate the record creator from the archival intervention. What archivist, after meticulously sorting through pages of diaries, folders of correspondence, and boxes of ephemera, has not felt emotionally connected to the creator of a collection? A feminist approach not only acknowledges this emotional bond, but also hinges an ethical orientation on it. By stewarding a collection, the archivist enters into a relationship of care with the record creator in which the archivist must do her best not only to empathize with the record creator, but also to allow that empathy to inform

36 Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy,* trans. W. Stein (Washington, DC: ICS Publications 1989), 6.
37 Ibid., 14–23.

the archival decision-making processes. For example, in making appraisal decisions, the archivist should ask, would the creator want this material to be made available? In making descriptive choices, the archivist should ask, what language would the creator use to describe the records? In making preservation decisions, the archivist should ask, would the creator want this material to be preserved indefinitely? This does not mean that the wishes of the creator trump that of the other interested parties – indeed the subject of the record, the user of the record, and the community of the record will likely have conflicting and more morally compelling claims to the record than the record creator – but rather, in a feminist approach, each one of these parties is considered empathetically and in relation to each other and to dominant power structures before archival decisions are made. As previously stated, an ethics of care does not erase power differentials, but rather is acutely attuned to inequities (and seeks to transform such inequities), even as it empathizes with all interested parties, including those who held and exploited positions of power.

The first author was recently confronted with an ethical dilemma in her role as a volunteer archivist for the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), a community-based archives she co-founded and on whose board she sits. SAADA is an online-only postcustodial archives: staff and volunteers for the organization borrow physical materials from families and institutions, digitize them, make them publicly accessible, and return them. There is nothing in the collection that is not freely accessible online. While digitizing a collection of papers related to Vaishno Das Bagai, an early Indian immigrant to the United States, she came across Bagai's personal suicide note, dated 1928, addressed to his wife and sons, marked at the top with red ink, underlined, and in capital letters: "NO ONE ELSE SHOULD READ THIS." Although Bagai had been dead for nearly 85 years, and his granddaughter who was donating the collection may have granted permission to digitize the note, the first author felt an affective responsibility to maintain Bagai's privacy. Out of a sense of empathy with and care for Bagai, developed over the course of processing his collection, the first author did not digitize the private suicide note.[38] As this case illustrates, archivists can enter into relationships of care with the creators of records that transcend space and time.

Similarly, the second author participated in making various difficult decisions to honour the wishes and feelings of the records creators, above those of others and institutional aims, in her work on the project Making Invisible Histories Visible: Preserving the History of Lesbian Feminist Activism and Writing in Los Angeles, a three-year collaboration between the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives, the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, and the

38 By contrast, Bagai also wrote a public suicide note that he requested be published in the local newspaper. This public suicide note was digitized.

UCLA Library. Red Arobateau's collection of his self-published poetry from the early 1970s was among the collections selected to be arranged, described, digitized, and made accessible. The selected collections tell unique and important stories of lesbian and feminist political acts, writing, desiring, and lives. This project presented a number of challenges, including the relationship between archivist and records creator in terms of negotiating the past and current needs and identifications of records creators. Some of the creators and donors who identified as lesbians at the time of their donation no longer identify as such. These challenges were heightened because of the increasingly public nature of their collections after their physical move to UCLA and greater presence online. It is lesbian history that the Mazer Archives is dedicated to preserving and promoting in order to help other community members "understand more fully" their own identities and histories and to help them "maintain this vital link to their own past."[39] Red is a transsexual man who identified earlier in his life with the lesbian community. In this case, Red's gender identity and relationship to the lesbian community, past and present, are public knowledge, so there were no concerns about outing him or otherwise violating his privacy. However, there were still significant concerns as to how to respect and honour his identity and place in the archives. There was no consensus on how to account for Red's gender identity in the collection's description.[40] Stacy Wood, who processed the collection, persevered in her decision to note his gender identity as a "transsexual" in the finding aid's abstract and biographical information.[41] In this case, a resolution was reached that placed higher value on honouring the identity, experiences, and desires of the records creator than on the discomfort of others involved with the archives. The potential complexities of shifting identifications and relationships to archives and collections in this case gestures to other instances when the creators, subjects, users, and communities of our records, those deserving our empathy, might be in deep and complex conflict. If a records creator no longer identifies with a community, what does it mean for them to be represented as part of that community in archives? Should those shifting relations be accounted for in our descriptions, policies, and outreach efforts? While there is no singular formula for navigating these complex and ongoing relationships, we must consider carefully the relations of the records creator and other stakeholders to multiple axes of power. A relationship of care in

39 June L. Mazer Archives, "About Us," accessed 20 September 2015, http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org/about-us.

40 Stacy Wood, "Un/Natural Silences: Donor Requested Destruction in the June L. Mazer Archives" (presentation, Archival Education and Research Institute, Austin, TX, 20 June 2013).

41 University of California, Los Angeles, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA Library Special Collections, finding aid for the Red Arobateau Papers (Collection 1950), accessed 23 September 2015, http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c83n2446/entire_text.

such cases demands a complicated navigation of the desires and needs of the records creators.

Second affective responsibility: the relationship between archivist and the subject of records. Here, the archivist has an affective responsibility to those about whom records are created, often unwittingly and unwillingly. Such stakeholders include Indigenous and colonial subjects counted, classified, studied, enslaved, traded as property, and/or murdered. In dealing with such records – and virtually every archivist has dealt with such records – a feminist approach guides the archivist to an affective responsibility to empathize with the subjects of the records and, in so doing, to consider their perspectives in making archival decisions. This is in contrast to the dominant Western mode of archival practice, in which archivists solely consider the legal rights of records creators, too often ignoring the record subject and the sometimes fuzzy line between creator and subject. In the feminist approach, the archivist cares about and for and with subjects; she empathizes with them.

Here, the feminist ethics approach is in line with recent archival studies scholarship – particularly Australian work on co-creatorship and Indigenous claims to colonial records – that aims to recover and reassert the voices of record subjects in the archival process.[42] For example, Livia Iacovino's work on records created by Australian government officials about Indigenous populations details the ways in which the descendants of those record subjects have been shut out of the decision-making processes regarding archival description and access policies. While the dominant interpretation of creatorship narrowly bestows physical and intellectual property rights on records creators and denies those same rights to record subjects, Iacovino proposes a new "participant model of co-creatorship" that grants the Indigenous subjects of records (and the community of their descendants) the rights to control, describe, respond to, and use records documenting colonial violence.[43] Iacovino's proposed model exemplifies an archival responsibility to the subjects of records and opens up the possibility for new and deeper relationships between archivists and such subjects. We would add an affective dimension to Iacovino's brilliant model by emphasizing the affective responsibility of the archivist to the subjects of such records.

42 See Chris Hurley, "Parallel Provenance: (1) What If Anything Is Archival Description?" *Archives and Manuscripts* 33, no. 1 (2005): 110–45; Sue McKemmish, Shannon Faulkhead, and Lynette Russell, "Distrust in the Archive: Reconciling Records," *Archival Science* 11, no. 34 (November 2011): 211–39; and Sue McKemmish et al., "Resetting Relationships: Archives and Indigenous Human Rights in Australia," *Archives and Manuscripts* 39, no. 1 (2011): 107–44.

43 Livia Iacovino, "Rethinking Archival, Ethical and Legal Frameworks for Records of Indigenous Australian Communities: A Participant Relationship Model of Rights and Responsibilities," *Archival Science* 10, no. 4 (December 2010): 353–72.

To provide another example of the affective bond between archivist and record subject, as part of the collaborative project between the Mazer Archives and UCLA described above, the second author conducted life oral histories with key members of the Mazer's board of directors, eight women with long-term involvement in the Archives and the Los Angeles lesbian community.[44] These oral histories were collaborative dialogues built on trust. The second author shares with her narrators a gender identification as a woman, the identity and privileges of being white, a middle-class upbringing and white-collar professional occupation, and education through graduate levels. Though they employ different terminology to describe their sexualities, the narrators and the second author also share, in terms of their sexualities, positions and experiences outside the heterosexual norm. These multiple shared positions were fundamental to building affective bonds and to the products that resulted. Our privileged homogeneity also introduced a number of significant limitations that can serve to produce a very narrow frame of community and history. The histories capture the stories, feelings, and meanings derived from each narrator's individual frame of reference and what is important to her. The narrators provided fascinating personal insights about the lived experiences of individual lesbians, their communities, and lesbian and feminist activism in Los Angeles from the 1960s to the present. They spoke to experiences ranging from growing up as LGBTQ persons to engaging in consciousness raising, and the changes they have experienced in the lesbian community. Much of what they shared was deeply personal and involved stories of friendship, romantic relationships, and interpersonal conflict. There were also meaningful topics that were foreclosed, in particular because of racial privileges. Difficult decisions had to be made in concert with the narrators about what information was to be restricted, for how long, and what should be erased from the recordings altogether. These decisions were made largely to protect the privacy of record subjects, especially around sensitive information regarding sexuality and sexual orientation. In a relationship of caring, we must balance our desire to capture histories that would otherwise be silenced in the archival record with the privacy, desires, and needs of the subjects of our records.

Third affective responsibility: the relationship between archivist and user. Practising radical empathy with users means acknowledging the deep emotional ties users have to records, the affective impact of finding – or not finding – records that are personally meaningful, and the personal consequences that archival interaction can have on users. We can no longer operate as if archival users are all detached neutral subjects without a stake in the records they are

44 The oral histories are described in greater detail in an essay by the second author, "Oral Histories," in *The June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives: Making Invisible Histories Visible – A Resource Guide to the Collections,* ed. Kathleen A. McHugh, Brenda Johnson-Grau, and Ben Raphael Sher (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Women, 2014): 61–63.

using: finding out your father was killed at a certain place in a certain way, or that your ancestral land is legally claimed by someone else, or that you are, in fact, adopted – these are affective experiences. We cannot ethically continue to conceive of our primary users as academic scholars; survivors of human rights abuse and victims' families use records, artists use records, community members use records. We need to build policies, procedures, and services with these users in mind, but even more so, we need to shift our affective orientations in service to these users. An archivist's shift toward radical empathy here can be as simple as stocking tissues at the reference desk or as grand as the creation of descriptive systems, such as the Mukurtu system, that allow differential access for users based on historical and social context.[45] These shifts are both micro and macro, personal and institutional, with profound implications for archival practice.

For example, the second author's experiences as a queer-identified user at the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), a grassroots community archives based in Brooklyn, New York, point to the significance of considering the user's affective responses to records. For the second author, walking through the door into its beautiful brownstone for the first time in college remains one of her most powerful archival encounters. She was literally welcomed into someone's home (where the archives is located and where its caretaker resides), offered a cup of tea by the volunteer archivist and a seat on one of many living room couches, given the option of a tour, and then allowed to wander the open stacks on her own. This was a prospect both terrifying and thrilling. This experience reflects the LHA's aim to provide community members with the opportunity to see, to touch, and to feel their own history. That visit and each of her return visits provided "an emotional rather than a narrowly intellectual experience," as scholar Ann Cvetkovich describes it.[46] In this case, honouring affect was about the archivist's reading of the user; for the second author, the opportunity to mediate her own experience of the archives was particularly powerful and gave her the space to feel, to touch, and to begin to build the identification with a queer past she so desperately desired. Being given the space to feel what she needed to also conveyed the archives' significant trust in her as a user and community member. Sometimes allowing for affect can be as simple as giving the user space and time to feel.

Fourth affective responsibility: the relationship between archivist and the larger community. In this shift, archivists have "responsibilities towards unseen others" – those who are not direct users of records, but for whom

45 Kimberly Christen, "Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation," *American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 185–210; Mukurtu, accessed 10 January 2015, http://www.mukurtuarchive.org.

46 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 241.

the use of records has lasting consequences.[47] This approach resonates with, but also expands on, Joel Wurl's assertion of ethnicity as provenance and Jeannette Bastian's idea of a "community of records."[48] Here, the archivist has an ethical obligation to empathize with all parties impacted by archival use – the communities for whom justice or impunity has lasting consequences, the community of people for whom representation – or silencing – matters. Elsewhere, the first author borrowed the term "symbolic annihilation" from feminist media scholars to describe how communities feel when people with whom they are identified are ignored, maligned, or misrepresented in archival collecting.[49] Symbolic annihilation is also a useful concept here to discuss the consequences when archivists fail to empathize with larger communities for whom the records in their care have import. In the affective responsibilities to larger communities implicated in archival work, archivists must ask: What are the consequences of my decisions on the larger community? Whose voices are silenced if a particular collection is not accessioned? Is the descriptive language I am using respectful to the larger communities of people invested in this record? Am I preserving and providing access to this record in ways that are cohesive with the culture of the community from whom the records emerged? Too often there are too many barriers between local communities and the academic and government repositories where records documenting community history reside. In contrast, practising radical empathy with larger communities of records entails that the archivist place herself in an affective relationship with the community. The tangible results of this approach may be the creation of new appraisal policies that bolster social inclusion or the reconceptualization of outreach programs in response to legacies of intellectual extraction, inequity, mistrust, colonialism. In this re-framing, archivists sit within the ever-changing dynamics of community.

An example from the second author's experience demonstrates the importance of creating new records and reconceptualizing outreach programs when engaging in radical empathy with larger communities. Such an affective orientation to communities can document, speak to, and challenge long legacies of marginalization, inequity, and mistrust. The Polk Street: Lives in

47 McEwan and Goodman, "Place Geography and the Ethics of Care."

48 See Joel Wurl, "Ethnicity as Provenance: In Search of Values and Principles Documenting the Immigrant Experience," *Archival Issues* 29, no. 1 (2005): 65–76; Jeannette Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost Its Archives and Found Its History* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2003); and Jeannette Bastian, "Reading Colonial Records through an Archival Lens: The Provenance of Place, Space and Creation," *Archival Science* 6, no. 3–4 (December 2006): 267–84.

49 See Gaye Tuchman, "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media," in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, ed. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3–38; and Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight against Symbolic Annihilation," *Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (November 2014): 26–37.

Transition project demonstrates the stakes and possibilities of such an affective community engagement. The project, led by public historian Joey Plaster, collected and interpreted more than 70 oral histories relating to contemporary neighbourhood change and conflict, which are housed at the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco.[50] Polk Street is a neighbourhood that has historically been home to some of the most underrepresented persons in the LGBTQ community – transgender women, queer people of colour, homeless youth, sex workers, and immigrants.[51] In the words of Plaster, the community "predates the modern gay rights movement and remains a visible manifestation of the stereotypes the movement has worked to scrub clean over the past 40 years, that is: queer people as mentally ill, criminal, licentious, doomed to lonely lives." Instead of repudiating this history, Plaster sought to "embrace and learn from it."[52] The project intervened in a period of significant change when gentrification with its rising rents was forcing out long-term residents, working-class gay and trans bars were closing, and new mid-income residents and businesses were rapidly moving in. Through oral histories, exhibitions, a radio documentary, and community meetings and events, the project built community and facilitated dialogue about these issues. Plaster formed deep affective bonds with community members and recorded their stories where they felt most comfortable – in bars, churches, apartments, and streets and alleyways. Plaster's oral histories (which the second author had the pleasure of transcribing as a volunteer for the GLBT Historical Society) focused on those who had the deepest emotional connections to the neighbourhood and were at the centre of the conflict – the homeless and marginally housed youth and new business owners. Such projects and affective ethical relations are not just about the preservation of history, but also about creating social change. As the Reverend Megan Rohrer, executive director of the neighbourhood organization Welcome Ministry, said, "It's hard to discount someone once you've heard their story." Rohrer credits the project with helping merchants better understand the needs of the homeless, thus shifting attitudes and garnering support.[53] Creating space for the voices of communities that are often misunderstood, vilified, and/or deemed unable to speak for themselves and making those stories public, both within those communities and far beyond them, is key to building trust, honouring the voices and experiences of individuals whose stories are too

50 GLBT Historical Society, "Polk Street: Lives in Transition," accessed 6 March 2015, http://www.glbthistory.org/PolkProject.

51 Joey Plaster, "Polk Street: Lives in Transition," accessed 6 March 2015, http://jplaster.commons.yale.edu/polk-street-lives-in-transition.

52 Joey Plaster, Jay Allison, and Viki Merrick, "Polk Street Stories: A Transom Radio Special" (21 June 2010), accessed 6 March 2015, http://transom.org/2010/polk-street-stories.

53 Katherine Seligman, "Oral Histories Tell Polk Street's Story," *San Francisco Chronicle* (8 August 2009), accessed 6 March 2015, http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Oral-histories-tell-Polk-Street-s-story-3220904.php.

often silenced, and upholding in the wider community our ethical relationships as archivists.

In the first author's experiences working with SAADA, for example, she is beholden not only to the donors of records, the organization's financial supporters, and diverse groups of users (all of whom she is certainly beholden to), but also to larger South Asian American communities – and even then, not just to existing communities, but to the generations of communities yet to come.[54] She has an affective responsibility, forged through archival labour, to those "unseen others" whose world is and will be shaped by SAADA's work in the present, to those whom Verne Harris calls "the 'non-subjects,' the ones excluded, erased, expunged, unimagined."[55] Even for those community members who never have and never will visit SAADA's website, our existence as an archives matters because our work shapes how the community conceives of its past, documents its present, and imagines its futures. Here, we demonstrate the larger societal impact of archives. It matters if South Asian American children can see themselves reflected in history lessons. It matters if South Asian American anti-racist activists can be inspired by the radically anti-colonial Ghadar party of the 1910s. It matters if South Asian American hip hop artists can appropriate, sample, and repurpose oral history interviews from SAADA's collections to create new anthems for new generations. These uses, real and imagined, ongoing or unforeseeable, matter because they have the potential to change the shape and direction of the community beyond the archives. As such, we have an affective responsibility beyond the record, beyond the record's creators, the record's subjects, and the record's users, beyond the archives, to the future.

Conclusion: Toward a Feminist Archival Ethics

In summary, a feminist ethics of care approach places the archivist in a web of relationships with each of the concerned parties and posits that the archivist has an affective responsibility to responsibly empathize with each of the stakeholders. The act that creates the record binds the record creator with the record subject, the subject with the larger community, and the archivist with all involved parties. In this light, radical empathy can guide each archival decision. This approach not only acknowledges the affective labour that many archivists already perform, but places such affective labour at the centre of the archival endeavour.

54 This echoes Verne Harris's call for archivists to be responsible for the ghosts "not yet born"; see Verne Harris, "Hauntology, Archivy, and Banditry: An Engagement with Derrida and Zapiro," *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 29, suppl. 1 (December 2015): 18.

55 Verne Harris, email communication with first author, 21 November 2014.

An archival approach based on the feminist ethics of care replaces the abstract legal and moral obligations of archivists as liberal autonomous individuals (as heretofore conceived through scholarship and professional codes of ethics) with an affective responsibility to engage in radical empathy with others, seen and unseen. It acknowledges that relationships change over time, that while the record may be fixed, our obligations to it – its creator, its subject, its users, its community – are constantly evolving in ways unforeseen. And it remains guided by social justice concerns, that is, by attempts to use archival thinking and practice to enact a more just vision of society.

Much more work needs to be done to further conceptualize how feminist ethics may cause us to rethink archival roles. Deeper interrogation is needed to unpack this notion of radical empathy and to examine archival relationships in ways that do not erase differences about and between bodies. Given the importance feminist theory places on situated knowledges, multiple case studies are needed to explore how an archival ethics of care has been or can be enacted in real world environments. More theoretical work needs to be done at the intersection between feminist and queer approaches to archives, opening up new possibilities for radical reinterpretations of archival ethics in the future. This article marks a first step in what we hope will be a large and rich trajectory of research and practice.

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Rapid-Response Collecting after the Pulse Nightclub Massacre

Pam Schwartz, Whitney Broadaway, Emilie S. Arnold, Adam M. Ware, and *Jessica Domingo*

ABSTRACT: Five collections and exhibitions professionals from the Orange County Regional History Center, a history museum located in downtown Orlando, Florida, reveal their experiences developing the One Orlando Collection in the wake of the June 12, 2016, Pulse Nightclub massacre. Within days of the event, they began to collect thousands of Pulse-related objects left at public memorials or donated to the museum. Examining the origins of the project through the challenges of field collection, the effect the team's work had on the community, decisions around exhibiting collected objects, and the professional and emotional impacts the job had on the team, this article suggests what other museum professionals in similar situations may be faced with should the unimaginable happen.

KEY WORDS: mass violence, condolence collections, Pulse Nightclub, massacre, LGBTQ, oral history, morale, emergency planning, disaster planning

It Happened to Us

Pam Schwartz, Chief Curator

Our staff awoke the morning of June 12, 2016, to the news that a homegrown terrorist had murdered forty-nine and injured sixty-eight people after last call on Latin Night at Pulse Nightclub, a popular gay club a little over a mile from where we live and work.

When I first heard about it, this had not yet become "the most lethal shooting by a single gunman in modern American history," nor had it been labeled "terrorism" or "the deadliest hate crime against the American LGBTQ community." But I still knew history was happening right before my eyes. I immediately drafted a five-page collecting plan for what would become our museum's "One Orlando Collection Initiative."

As an outpouring of material tributes from across the world accumulated around Orlando, we focused on how to collect them. We discussed hiring additional staff, collecting artifacts from within the club itself (once the FBI released the scene), gathering oral histories and photographs, recording the international

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response, and ultimately preserving and exhibiting for our community the history of this event of unfathomable violence and hate.

That this event needed to be collected was never a question for us, but there were many others:

- Who owns the memorial items?
- How will the community react to our collecting them?
- What about our current projects of planning the entire museum's redesign? The seven upcoming exhibitions we have to write, produce, and install?
- When is too soon to collect? To exhibit? To interpret?

Our museum, the Orange County Regional History Center, is a public/private nonprofit history museum with about twenty-five staff members. Four to five of our core staff worked on this initiative, facing a flood of high public emotion, media scrutiny, controlling local politics, and an already grueling exhibitions schedule—not to mention the difficulties of collecting outdoors for days in the record heat of a merciless Orlando summer. We forged ahead to document and collect, not realizing how it would assist our community in both its grieving and healing, or how it would affect our own.

Within months we created an online memorial for the artifacts and photographs we were collecting. The site allowed widespread victims' families and a grieving nation to participate in some small way in the memorialization that was happening across Orlando. Mourners contacted us to share the stories of the items they had left, and we could show our community our preservation in progress.

The memorialization of the Pulse Nightclub shooting is not over. Though we have passed the grim mantle of "the deadliest shooting" on to Las Vegas and as mass violence seems evermore commonplace, each day presents new information, new artifacts, and new appointments to record oral histories. It is an ever-evolving story of impact on our community.

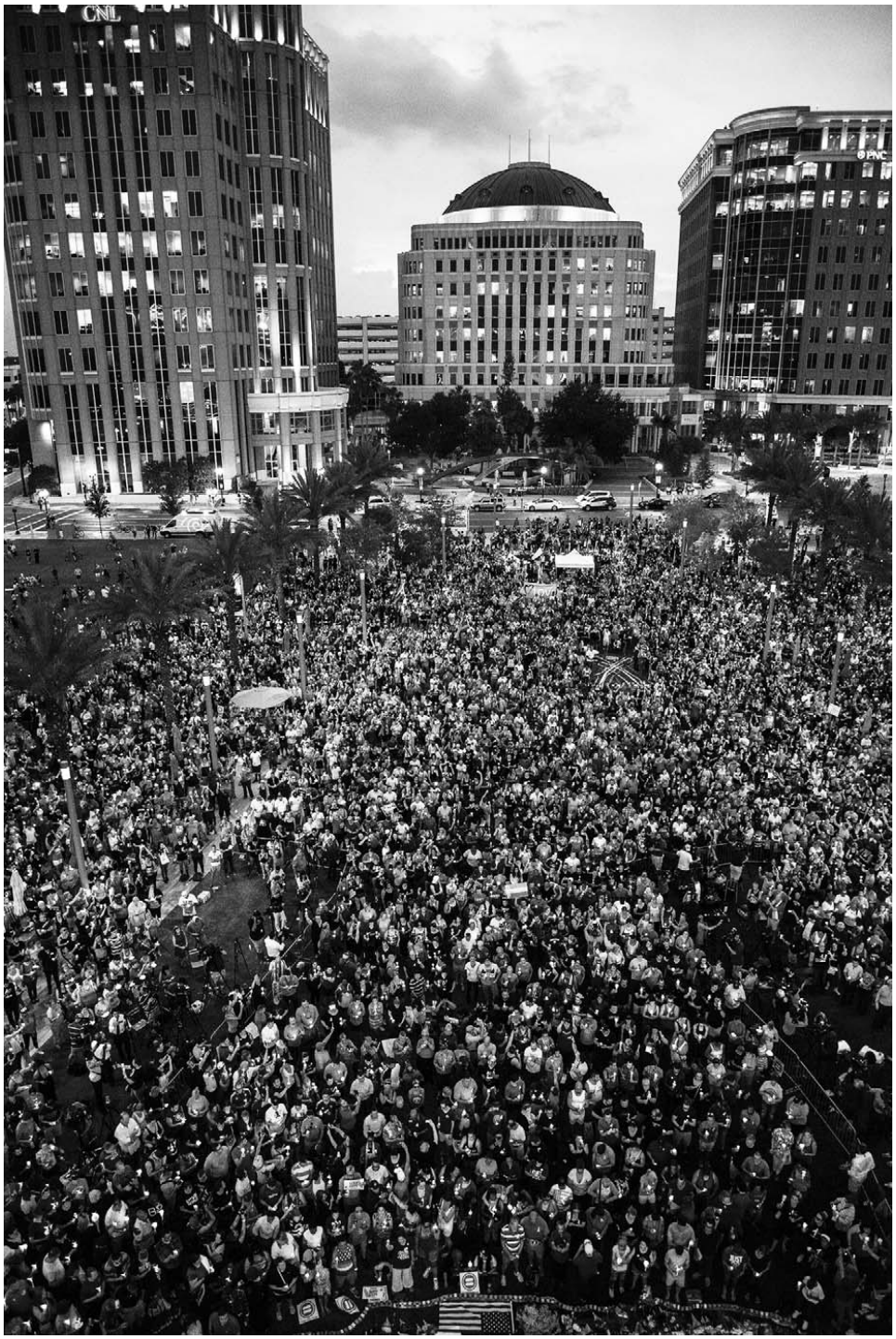
Like many museums, ours has struggled for greater visibility, understanding, and intersectionality in all that we do. Our response to Pulse thrust us into the public eye and allowed us to show our community what reactive and inclusive public history and museum work looks like.

Contained within this article are the personal and professional experiences of our staff members, which we hope will help others understand what their role could be and inspire other museums to discuss how their communities might face the unimaginable.

Rapid-Response Collecting

Whitney Broadaway, Collections Manager

The first site of memorial activity after the shooting was historic Lake Eola in downtown Orlando. After placing Spanish-English bilingual signs at the site on June



Vigil held on June 13, 2016, at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. The beginnings of an incredible temporary memorial collected by History Center staff are visible in the foreground. (Photo courtesy of the Orange County Regional History Center)

23 to let our community understand what we were doing, just eleven days after the shooting, staff arrived with empty boxes and began selecting items for preservation based on their unique nature, apparent significance, condition, and vulnerability to

the elements. As one temporary memorial site grew to four in a matter of weeks, we refined our field collecting and conservation methods to include a table and tent system at the city-designated memorial at the Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center (DPAC) and later the sites at the Orlando Regional Medical Center (ORMC), where many of the survivors were treated, and at Pulse Nightclub itself.

From the very beginning, we photographed each item we identified for collection before we laid hands on it, documenting its location and relationship to other objects around it. This picture inventory also served as a comprehensive record due to the sheer quantity of items we collected across weeks in the field; a paper list was impractical. Some items broke through our defenses more than others. I remember collecting signs in the gravel at DPAC. We lifted one poster to reveal a simple sign, black lettering on white, and the words "we will always love you, mom" jumped out at me. I had lost my mother a few years before, and as a mother myself, I was not prepared to encounter those words from grieving children. I was on photo duty at the time and had to quickly turn to face the passing traffic as I sobbed.

Everything that could be safely stored in boxes we packed for later assessment, but some items were either too wet or too dirty, requiring preliminary conservation care. The most common threat was water: we created a drying press using blotting paper to squeeze moisture from paper and signs and removed saturated paper items from plastic sheet protectors.

We persevered through molten candle wax, wasps' nests, and pools of water rancid with flower petals. The worst encounter came when a horde of spiders rained over us as we removed a portion of a forty-nine-foot Hawaiian lei. Florida's hot, humid, and rainy summer climate meant the items we were collecting were fraught with sun bleaching, mold, and mildew. Many items at these sites disintegrated before we ever reached them, especially at DPAC where the memorial was placed on a grassy lawn.

Once collected from the memorial site, we temporarily filled every empty History Center office, conference room, and our library with the items. There we double-checked for moisture and allowed the artifacts to air out and acclimatize. At this point, we evaluated anything with mold or mildew for quarantine. After the items sat overnight, they were carefully repacked, temporarily labeled with their collection date and location, and transported to our off-site climate-controlled storage facility thirty minutes away. This became our grueling schedule: collecting across multiple memorial sites, then processing and transporting those items, before finally beginning work on our regular daily tasks. This process often started at seven thirty in the morning and ended after ten o'clock at night, lasting for more than thirty-one days.

One Year Later, an Exhibition

Emilie S. Arnold, Assistant Curator of Exhibitions

Following the massacre, the History Center hosted two exhibitions displaying One Orlando Collection objects. The first, *Pride, Prejudice & Protest: GLBT History of*

History Center staff beginning to collect artifacts from inside Pulse Nightclub after its release from the FBI. (Photo courtesy of the Orange County Regional History Center)

Greater Orlando, had been in the planning stages for months when the shooting occurred. With a scheduled opening date in October, we took action to design a twenty-foot wall to honor the murdered, incorporating a small selection of powerful memorial objects. The following June, our Spanish-English bilingual, one-year remembrance exhibition, *One Year Later: Reflecting on Orlando's Pulse Nightclub Massacre*, filled 3,200 square feet.

As an exhibition curator and member of Orlando's grieving community, my work at the memorials gave me a deep familiarity with the most extraordinary objects, images, and oral histories we'd gathered. Many items left indelible impressions on me and demanded display in an exhibition. At Pulse Nightclub, for example, mourners picked stones out of a gravel berm and personalized them with markers. That's where I found a three-sided stone bearing the words "Because of this, my mom showed me love," a message that both broke and mended my heart. We also found objects of solidarity from other places that experienced mass violence: Newtown, Aurora, Boston, San Bernadino, and New York (9/11).

Some items remain much too raw to exhibit. Spending a day in the broken and bullet-pierced nightclub, we gathered objects that spoke of desperation, death, and survival: a bathroom door and wall riven by bullets, a sagging sink that helped trapped clubgoers climb to safety through a tiny hole high on the wall, a cabinet in which survivors huddled. Although physical testimony to Orlando's darkest days,

we felt it was not time to display these things, especially while the graves of the murdered remain fresh and scores of victims struggle to put the horror of the massacre behind them. With these experiences in mind, I approached our one-year exhibition determined that no matter whom or how our guests mourned or how they responded to the events of that day, they could find themselves reflected in this gallery—and hopefully uplifted by Orlando's rejection of violence and outpouring of love.

I began by acknowledging those directly involved in the aftermath of the shooting by displaying the names, faces, and ages of the murdered (in this case, using portraits by several Orlando artists). We also designated sections to express gratitude for the scores of law enforcement, medical professionals, and counselors who put themselves on the line as first responders, as well as the local LGBTQ support organizations that became community focal points. We illustrated their stories using objects they donated, along with hundreds of notes and drawings retrieved from the memorials.

The exhibition benefited from an excellent collection of digital photographs from multiple sources. They show Orlando in the first weeks and months after the shooting in ways that make it seem both recent and long ago: buildings throughout the city festooned with rainbow flags, images of mourners attending vigils and fundraisers, and even glimpses of police and reporter activity in the days directly following June 12.

Due to scheduling, *One Year Later* ran for only one week. Admission was free, and the History Center still saw unprecedented visitation in excess of three thousand people. Personal accounts taught us that guests *did* see themselves in our exhibition, whether they empathized with the sentiments it contained or literally found evidence of themselves in Orlando's recorded history. Photographer J. D. Casto saw his images on display and, as he told us, "hid in a corner and cried." After visiting to record an oral history for the collection, Chimene Hurst examined a photograph of donors lined up to give blood the morning of June 12 and was startled to find her face in the midst of hundreds of others. Speaking with the *Orlando Sentinel*, Brian Alvear, whose sister Amanda died at Pulse, said, "I think it's beautiful, I think it's amazing. . . . I wish it was permanent. It's sad we're not going to be able to see it year round or go whenever we want."[1]

Community Impact

Adam M. Ware, Historian and Research Librarian

Public historical institutions and collecting bodies occupy an unstable space relative to the communities they serve because they are often a part of the very stories they preserve and interpret. Concurrently, participation in a mass-trauma

1 Steve Hudak, "Pulse History Exhibit Makes Some Weep, Others Smile," *Orlando Sentinel*, June 16, 2017.

memorial, whether by leaving offerings or merely through attendance, functions as a kind of ritual redress. Memorialization serves to remedy the unbalanced accounts of human experience: by combating feelings of isolation with community unity, the absence of victims with the presence of a material offering, the darkness of loss with a lit candle, or destruction with artistic creation. It is a process of creating meaning out of meaninglessness and order out of chaos. In practical ways, the behaviors of History Center staff helped to catalyze that process, whether through sequential retrieval, photographing, and care processes or through wearing uniform black t-shirts that identified us as History Center professionals.

In the initial phases our work generated curiosity from onlookers. Refining our rapid-response collecting procedures acted to fulfill the History Center's core mission to collect and preserve Central Florida history, while our work became, for the hundreds of visitors with whom we interacted, a real part of the memorials themselves. As a result, our impact as a community resource extended far beyond the immediate fulfillment of our mission. Our work conferred a sense of stability and uniformity that both rendered our triaging tasks manageable and eased the minds of the grieving.

Our presence at the sites provided opportunities to address questions that grew into positive and meaningful interactions that embodied our commitment to service as a community resource. In time, local and national news media included coverage of our work while reporting on the memorials themselves, and spontaneous Q&A exchanges with reporters uploaded via Facebook Live drew responses that revealed deep public support for the tasks that lay ahead of us. By helping people to understand our work in the immediate moment, we saw our work providing comfort to friends and family members eager to combat the fear that their loved ones would be forgotten, or that the immense expression of unity embodied in the sites would evaporate. Firsthand, we saw the value that public history can offer in a time of traumatic crisis.

The presence of homophobic sentiment in the memorials' material record is minimal. In the cases where it appears it includes counteragents. For example, "Action Angel Wings" made and worn by members of the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre Company protected attendees of victims' funerals from the sight and sound of Westboro Baptist Church picketers. Opposition to the work of the initiative and its decolonizing effect on the collections was subtle, couched in concern for its impact on our extant holdings (of largely white, Protestant, and prosperous men). While attending a local genealogical fair, I was approached by a woman lamenting the collection. When I drew connections between our core mission—to collect, preserve, and interpret the material history of Central Florida—and the time-sensitive work of preserving the memorials, she gasped and informed me of her desire "to see someone dig a hole, take a bulldozer, and push all that Pulse stuff in it so [History Center staff] can get back to what matters." This desire to exclude Central Florida's LGBTQ and Latinx citizens in the narrative of Central

Florida history is a chilling and dehumanizing threat that public historians must confront on ethical and practical grounds.

Our work recontextualized how mourners saw and participated in the memorials. As word spread that the History Center would be preserving items, the kinds of items we saw began to change. Art installations became more complex, items registering the presence of particular groups and institutions emerged, and the story of Pulse memorializing underwent changes. The massacre itself, its memorials, and our work as a collecting repository all represent distinct but inseparable microhistories. The interrelationship of the memorials and our collection of them reflected a therapeutic process for all involved.

That therapeutic dimension to the History Center's work extended to currently over two hundred oral histories conducted with survivors, first responders, family members, and community leaders, many of whom found a measure of relief in giving voice to their memories and feelings without being overwhelmed by news media outlets or government bodies. As in conversations with mourners at the sites, these admissions of confidence and trust reflect not only the value the History Center purports to offer its publics, but also the value they clearly perceive in our work.

Institutional Impact

Jessica Domingo, One Orlando Registrar

Prior to the shooting, our departments were already short staffed, relying on volunteers and interns for assistance with some projects. Field collecting added thousands of artifacts that needed to be conserved, cataloged, marked, packed, and stored. It was impossible for an already overwhelmed staff member charged with normal day-to-day operation to assume this responsibility. The institution needed to take on a full-time employee solely dedicated to the care of the Pulse collection.

As a History Center volunteer, I spent two months helping to collect at the memorials before being offered the position of registrar for the One Orlando Collection. As a graduate student in a museum studies program, this presented an opportunity to augment my experience with real, impactful work. I hold a full-time, six-month contract renewable up to two years, and my work continues to this day. The field collecting has been suspended, but donations still come in, a year and a half after the event. Processing the One Orlando Collection has been an exhausting and at times emotional assignment, and it seems to be one that will continue into perpetuity.

Becoming custodians of the memorial sites required a staggering number of man hours. Keeping a regular business schedule was not possible, if we wanted to be 100 percent committed to this project. Days were long. Our small crew turned on our business brains, allowing the weight of this project to stifle our own broken hearts. Only in the privacy of our own homes, held by our loved ones, could we truly break down and release the tears we had been holding in.

Aside from the emotional toll, we also struggled physically, battling sunburn, the threat of mosquito-borne Zika virus, exhaustion, and dehydration. For days we were covered in sweat, stagnant water from vases, rotting flowers, candle wax, and glitter. It is worth acknowledging that none of us ever second guessed this project. We all knew in our hearts it had to be done, despite the toll that it took on us.

During the first week of August 2016, we learned that our field collecting would, in fact, include gathering items from inside Pulse Nightclub. Realizing that this would be an emotionally difficult task, our chief curator allowed us to choose whether to participate. Having myself been a frequent patron of the nightclub years ago, I felt entering the building after such a horrific event would be too much to bear, and I just did not have the emotional strength to endure it after spending so much time completely immersed in the heartfelt sentiments of our grieving community. My coworkers did, spending hours inside preserving remains of violence and the soul of the Pulse that was. It is an experience they can never unlive.

We collected thousands and thousands of items from the various memorial sites, directly from families, and from around the world. Each of us have our favorites, some because they make us smile and others because they adequately express the magnitude of the event. To date, I have cataloged approximately six thousand Pulse-related items, so it is hard to choose just one that really speaks to me. There is a multicolored plush alpaca I call Pedro that (for now) lives on my desk. His feet are dirty from being at the memorial site outside Pulse Nightclub, but he wears a heart-warming smile that helps me get through especially difficult days.

There is also a green-and-white-striped sock monkey that plays a recorded song when its paw is squeezed. Its song, Usher's "Got Us Fallin' in Love," made me cry every time. It took me inside the club that night, and I could imagine all the victims having the time of their lives. For that moment, they were safe, happy, and surrounded by love. The monkey symbolized the joy the victims felt only seconds before everything was taken away. Though our work to preserve the history of our community cannot bring the forty-nine back or take away the pain of all the others who were affected, it can help to heal and serve as a lesson for the generations to come.

• • • • •

Emilie Arnold, assistant curator of exhibitions, holds a master of heritage preservation degree from Georgia State University and a master of history museum studies degree from the Cooperstown Graduate Program. Emilie is a museum generalist with experiences in all aspects of exhibition development and working familiarity with museum archives and collections.

Whitney Broadaway, collections manager, has been creating museum exhibits and preserving collections since 2006. She was previously the conservator at

University of Central Florida's Special Collections and University Archives, is an internationally exhibited artist, and has a fine arts degree in printmaking and bookbinding from UCF.

Jessica Domingo, One Orlando registrar, is currently pursuing a graduate degree in library science with a concentration in museum studies. She aspires to follow her love for the museum field, to continue to work in collections, and also gain knowledge in historic preservation.

Pam Schwartz, chief curator, has sixteen years of museum experience as a director, curator, consultant, and designer. She is a peer reviewer for the American Alliance of Museums Accreditation and MAP programs. Pam currently serves on the advisory council to the onePULSE Foundation working to build the permanent Pulse Nightclub memorial and museum.

Adam M. Ware, historian and research librarian of the History Center's Joseph L. Brechner Research Center, holds a PhD in American religious history with emphasis in museum studies from Florida State University.

HISTORY@WORK

The accidental web archive: The Tragedy at Virginia Tech Collection

14 MARCH 2018 – ROGER CHRISTMAN

Archives, ***Rapid Response***, ***The Publich Historian***, ***TPH 40.1***, ***TPH Rapid Response***

Editor's note: This is the third post of a series that continues the conversation begun in the February 2018 issue of The Public Historian *with the roundtable "Responding Rapidly to Our Communities."*

Eleven years ago, Seung Hui Cho killed thirty-two people and injured at least seventeen others before turning the gun on himself. At the time, the April 16, 2007, massacre at Virginia Tech was the deadliest shooting incident by a single gunman in US history. In 2007, I worked at the Library of Virginia as a state records archivist and managed the library's budding web archiving program. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, I quickly created a web archive collection, Tragedy at Virginia Tech, in order to capture how the Commonwealth of Virginia responded as recorded online. Tragedy at Virginia Tech is an early example of a rapid response collection and in hindsight provides some lessons learned for public historians when creating these type of collections.

Screenshot from Virginia Tech website, April 17, 2007.

In 2007, web archiving was in its infancy. Facebook and Twitter were relatively new and not widely used, especially by government. The Internet Archive's subscription web archiving service, Archive-It, was less than two years old. The Library of Virginia became the first Archive-It partner in 2006 and I began managing the library's web archiving program. It was primarily a solo venture; I was the library's lone web archiving arranger. I wrote the collection development policy, selected the websites to archive, did most of the quality assurance on crawls, and attempted to describe each collection and website. As the state archives, the library collects the archival records of Virginia state government, and the library's web archiving collection guidelines mirror those for the library's physical collections. Records from the commonwealth's public universities are outside the library's collection scope. But the policy, adopted in March 2007, was also flexible, allowing the library, at its discretion, to crawl websites related to "significant public safety and health incidents or other noteworthy events."

Tragedy at Virginia Tech did not start out as a rapid response collection. In fact, it was an accidental collection born in part by the technical limitations of Archive-It. One of the first web archive collections I created focused on the websites of the administration of Governor Tim Kaine. My initial reaction upon learning of the shooting at Virginia Tech was to crawl the governor's website. Due to

technical difficulties, the site was not working on April 16. A substitute page contained only Governor Kaine's statement on the shooting and promised additional information when the main site was restored. By the next day, the governor's website was back up and included a link to the Virginia Tech website, which contained news updates, messages to the Virginia Tech community, and podcasts of a press conference featuring Virginia Tech and state government officials. I quickly appraised these sites and decided to archive them. Even though the library does not collect the websites or records of Virginia's colleges and universities, I felt this content was important to understand the Kaine administration's response to the tragedy. This decision created a new set of challenges. Virginia Tech was adding new web content daily. How often should I capture each website? Virginia Tech was also creating new websites with content that was difficult to capture with Archive-It. How would I manage the capture? Should I add this material to the Kaine administration collection? Should I create a new collection? The quirks of Archive-It circa 2007 made the decision for me: I created a new collection.

Screenshot of Governor Kaine's website, April 16, 2007.

In 2007, Archive-It only allowed partners to archive a maximum of three hundred "seeds"—URL access points—at one time across all collections. The links to the Virginia Tech content found on Governor Kaine's website had a different web address than the seed (Governor Kaine's website) and Archive-It would not capture them. The Virginia Tech website had a similar issue; audio and video files on the site had different URLs. The only way to ensure the "play back" of the website was to crawl each out-of-scope seed separately. Creating the Tragedy at Virginia Tech collection made it easier for me to manage and schedule crawls given. I am happy to report Archive-It 2017 no longer has such limits and it makes it much easier to capture out-of-scope content.

The library had no plan for the Virginia Tech collection. The content reflects what I thought was important and possible to crawl at the time: government and university sites about the shooting, victims, after action reviews, and events commemorating the shooting's anniversary. It does not include memorial or tribute sites or media sites. It never occurred to me to collaborate with Virginia Tech on their April 16 Archive or to include other library staff members to assist me with site selection. This is not how a public historian would create a rapid response collection today. Diversity in setting the scope and selecting websites to include in a spontaneous collection should be a core requirement for two reasons. One, it is practical. One person cannot possibly know or have time to search for potential websites for a collection. Two, it may prevent individual bias from creeping into the collection. For example, many rapid response collections are created in the aftermath of mass shootings. Should your collection include content discussing gun control (both pro and con)? Having more people involved in the selection process, including the public via a website nomination process, can ensure that the collection reflects a diverse range of views even if you personally do not share them.

I remember creating the collection because of the "historic" nature of the shooting. I confess that I initially viewed that day's events with the emotional detachment of an archivist/historian. But what made it "historic"? The number of people killed? The thirty-two people who died on April 16, 2007, are not numbers. They had names, families, hopes and dreams—a future. The biographies of the dead quickly shattered my impassiveness. What I saw as "historic" in 2007 is an ever-present tragedy for the families who lost their loved ones.

Public historians need to recognize that collecting materials related to a tragedy is emotional and can affect you in unexpected ways. It happened to me five years after I created the Tragedy at Virginia Tech web archive when I began to process the e-mail of the Kaine administration. In the aftermath of the shooting at Virginia Tech, Governor Kaine provided his personal e-mail address to family members of those killed or wounded. Over the next two years, Governor Kaine and his staff exchanged e-mails with family members in which they describe their grief, their anger, and their search for answers. These e-mails were transferred to the library at the end of the Kaine administration in 2010. They are some of the most powerful records I have encountered as an archivist. Reading the biographies of the dead in 2007 captured in the web archive made me sad. Reading some of these e-mails overwhelmed me with emotions of grief. For the first time in my career, I had to stop working on a collection and walk away. Why did the e-mail affect me differently than the websites? What changed in the intervening five years? I became a parent. The possible loss of a child to violence was now real to me. It also reminded me that it is okay to have this type of reaction. It is what makes us human. My advice: if possible, do not go it alone. When creating a rapid response collection, look for collaborators even if it is just to help keep you emotionally grounded.

~ *Roger Christman* is a senior state records archivist at the Library of Virginia.

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ALL POETRY TO THE PEOPLE! BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT POETRY AS PUBLIC HISTORY

12 DECEMBER 2019 – MARY RIZZO

Archives, ***Baltimore***, ***Community History***, ***Digital History***, ***Poetry***, ***Projects***, ***Race***

Editor's Note: This is the first post in a three-part series on Baltimore's Chicory Revitalization Project. Following the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, black visual artists, writers, dancers, musicians, actors, and poets conceptualized themselves as part of the Black Arts Movement, a black nationalist political and aesthetic project.

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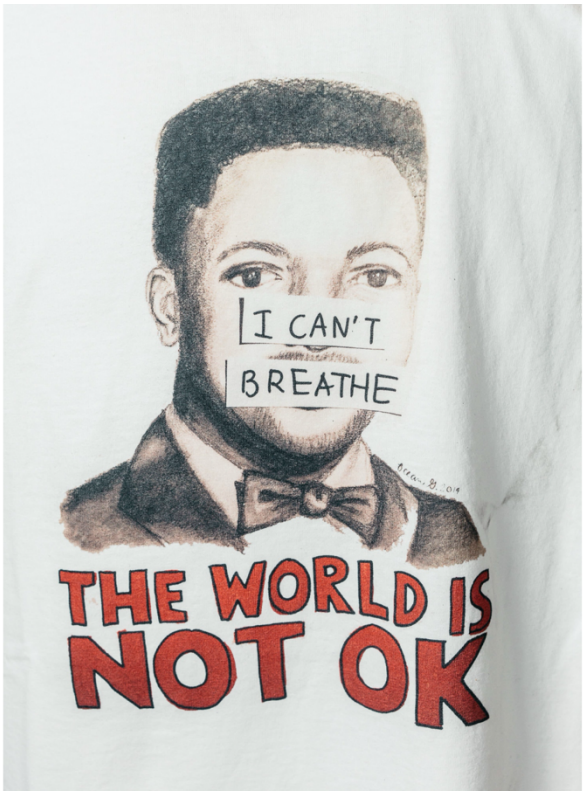
In an Era of Strife, Museums Collect History as It Happens

By Graham Bowley
Oct. 1, 2017
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/arts/design/african-american-museum-collects-charlottesville-artifacts.html



A T-shirt depicting the face of Eric Garner designed by Ocean Gao, now in the collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.
Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — In April 2015, Aaron Bryant rushed to be there when demonstrations swept through Baltimore on the day of Freddie Gray's funeral. He filmed protesters angered by Mr. Gray's death throwing rocks, watched the helicopters overhead and listened to marchers singing hymns.

But Mr. Bryant was neither a police officer nor a participant in the protest. He was a curator for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, there to collect artifacts, testimony and footage as the events unfolded. During the days of protest, he mingled with the crowds, solicited donations of clothing and signs and scooped up posters, fliers and buttons.

So after Councilwoman Sharon Green Middleton addressed a rally one day, Mr. Bryant approached to ask if she might donate the anti-violence T-shirt she was wearing. It now hangs in the museum.

Though curators have long secured select artifacts whose significance was immediately apparent, museum experts say the scope of what the African American museum and others now call "rapid response collecting" has grown significantly in recent years.

The museum's collection includes dozens of items gathered during the protests — a rake used in the cleanup, a placard that demanded "Justice for Freddie Gray" — some obtained on the spot, others days later after curators had combed social media, television and newspapers to find people who were there and ask what they might donate.

Video shot by the curator Aaron Bryant at a march for peace. Mr. Bryant was in Baltimore to collect artifacts following the death of Freddie Gray.

“We are in times that require us to acknowledge that history is happening before our eyes,” Mr. Bryant said.

A gas mask worn during demonstrations that took place in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014. The mirrored coffin, which was constructed as a symbolic object, was used at the same protest.
Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

In recent years, the museum has gathered hundreds of artifacts from other sudden, pivotal events: a suit worn in Ferguson, Mo., by a pastor protesting the death of Michael Brown; a Black Panther pin worn during the Million Man March anniversary in Washington; signs from the recent days of racial strife in Charlottesville, Va., and clothing that denounced the death of Eric Garner in New York.

“Any moment when America is debating its identity, it’s crucial to collect it,” said Lonnie G. Bunch III, the museum’s director.

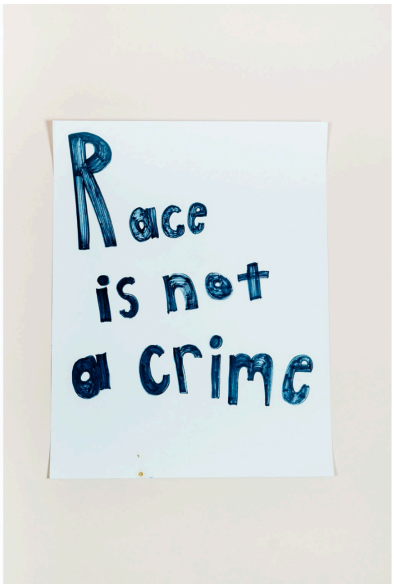
In Manhattan, the New-York Historical Society, sends out its “history brigades” to events like Occupy Wall Street and the Women’s March. In Orlando, Fla., the Orange County Regional History Center hurried to collect some 5,300 items to help it record the tragedy of the Pulse nightclub shooting.

The coffin at a standoff at the St. Louis County Police Department. Lawrence Bryant

“The police were out investigating and doctors were saving lives,” said Pam Schwartz, the Orlando museum’s chief curator. “And I had a job to do, too. What I do is preserve history.”

Ms. Schwartz and her staff drove a van through the streets in the weeks after the shooting, collecting drawings, cards and other objects from impromptu memorials, and putting up signs explaining that the tributes were being taken to a museum. Later, when the crime scene investigators were finished, she returned

and persuaded the owner of the nightclub to let her have for the collection a bullet-riddled door from the bathroom and a cabinet where people had hidden.



A poster from the protest in Baltimore in 2015, and a rake used in the clean-up afterward.
Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

A T-shirt depicting the face of Eric Garner and another worn in protest by Derrick Rose, then the point guard for the Chicago Bulls.
Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

"Think of it as Abraham Lincoln's hat," Ms. Schwartz said. "Physical proof in 200 years that this event actually happened."

W. James Burns, chairman of the curators committee of the American Alliance of Museums, said that institutions have traditionally waited for scholarship and perspective to sort out the significant from the ephemeral.

The flag known as the "Star-Spangled Banner," now in the National Museum of American History here, for example, did not become part of the Smithsonian Institution until 1907, more than 90 years after it flew over Fort McHenry.

Now, Mr. Burns said, "People expect us to be collecting as events happen because history is being seen as not what happened 50 years ago but what happened yesterday."

Jan Seidler Ramirez, chief curator at the National September 11 Memorial Museum in Manhattan, said that to collect contemporaneously is to engage in "fast, emotional, gut-instinctive decision-making."

Aaron Bryant, a curator at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.
Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

Mr. Bunch acknowledged, though, that collecting as events unfold could be risky. There's no guarantee that the material his curators gather and commit to preserving will turn out to be historically important. There's the risk that the museum can seem to be making a political statement about an event just because it is collecting from it. And each item takes up valuable storage space and has to be maintained, an expensive process.

But Mr. Bunch said the risks were worth it, and wondered today what artifacts he might have collected from, say, the Rodney King riots that rocked Los Angeles in 1992 or the life of Barbara Jordan, the congresswoman and scholar.

One moment the museum did not miss: the election of Barack Obama in 2008. Within days, Michèle Gates Moresi, a curator, learned that the Virginia campaign headquarters was closing and its contents were going to the Dumpster. She drove to Fairfax with a colleague in her husband's Chevrolet Blazer and took away office furniture, signs, photographs, whiteboards and other objects that could one day be reconfigured to convey the atmosphere of a campaign that had helped elect America's first black president.

"It is in the moment; it is very serendipitous," Ms. Moresi said.

Suit and shoes worn by Jamal H. Bryant, a pastor, during a protest in Ferguson.
Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

While several museums have recognized the potential of contemporary collecting, few are practicing it more systematically than the African American museum.

As unrest simmered in Ferguson, in 2014 after the shooting death of Mr. Brown, Mr. Bunch met with more than 20 museum staff members and asked them to start devoting considerably more of their time to collecting from the present.

Within weeks of the meeting, curators had started to locate objects from Ferguson, eventually gathering a gas mask worn during the protests by a journalist and activist, a mirrored coffin sculpture that had been carried through the streets and the wood used to board up a storefront.

"We are a museum of the present as well," said Rhea Combs, the curator who found the gas mask.

In Baltimore, four months later, as protests swelled because of Mr. Gray's death from injuries suffered while in police custody, Mr. Bryant said he decided there was too much happening on the day of the funeral to simply rely on capturing it all on his cellphone. So he also sought out anyone in the crowd who was holding a camera and looked serious about taking pictures.

Clergy members leading protesters to the Ferguson police station.

"Someone tapped me on the shoulder and asked me if I was a real photographer," Jermaine Gibbs recalled. At the time, Mr. Gibbs said, he was spending more time shooting weddings than history.

A pin and poster from the 20th anniversary of the Million Man March in 2015. Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

"I said, 'Yes,'" Mr. Gibbs said, "and he gave me his card. Two weeks later he reached out to me." Mr. Bryant and a colleague reviewed more than a thousand of Mr. Gibbs's pictures, and chose 19. Three are currently on exhibit at the museum.

When events in Charlottesville exploded this summer, the curators from the African American museum were too far away to begin collecting in person, so they sought out intermediaries to help document the clashes between white nationalists and counterprotesters.

Mr. Bryant reached out to several people and persuaded a University of Virginia graduate student who had taken part in the protests to donate some objects.

Three weeks after the events, the first glimpse of those gifts showed up on Mr. Bryant's computer in his fifth-floor office inside the museum. They were photographs of placards that had been paraded through the streets. Mr. Bryant opened his email to look at the images.

One homemade sign featured a picture of a clenched fist.

The words read, "Destroy All Monsters."

Another declared "Destroy White Supremacy."

It was a beginning, and Mr. Bryant looked pleased. "Not too shabby," he said.

• • •

Protesters marching in opposition to a white nationalist demonstration in Charlottesville, Va. The sign with the fist is among the items collected by the museum. Joshua Roberts/Reuters

Graham Bowley is an investigative reporter on the Culture desk. He also reported for The Times from Afghanistan in 2012. He is the author of the book "No Way Down: Life and Death on K2."

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/arts/design/african-american-museum-collects-charlottesville-artifacts.html

Posters, Banners, Boarding Passes: Museums Try to Get a Head Start on History

Brenda Malone, a curator at the National Museum of Ireland, holding a poster used by campaigners during the country's abortion referendum. Paulo Nunes dos Santos for The New York Times

By Alex Marshall
June 18, 2018

The day after Ireland's recent abortion referendum, Brenda Malone woke up early, walked to her car and took a stepladder and some wire cutters out of the trunk.

Then she started climbing up lampposts and cutting down any campaign posters she could find. The first one had a picture of a fetus on it, with the words "Don't repeal me."

Ms. Malone may have looked like an activist claiming mementos of the referendum or a protester making a final act of defiance after Ireland's vote to rescind the Constitution's ban on abortion. But Ms. Malone had different reasons: She is a curator at the National Museum of Ireland who is working to preserve the posters.

Since that day, Ms. Malone has put out a call for flags, banners and signs used in the campaign — she received her first item last week, and is in discussions for around 25 more. She also successfully asked for airline boarding passes from women who flew back to Ireland for the vote.

She asked friends via Facebook, too — but advised them not to climb any lampposts.

Other Irish museums have made similar requests. The National Gallery said on Twitter it was interested in collecting "anything with artistic intent and merit" tied to the referendum. Dublin City Council Library tweeted that it was looking for "ephemera."

Those calls are just the latest examples of "rapid response collecting," a practice that is increasingly being adopted by museums in Europe and America.

"Very early on in the campaign I realized we needed to collect these banners," Ms. Malone said in a telephone interview. "They spoke so strongly — they're so creative and witty," she said, adding that a personal favorite read, "Get your rosaries off my ovaries."

A protester, left, with a poster of Savita Halappanavar, a woman whose 2012 death by septic miscarriage escalated the debate about abortion in Ireland. Right, the poster, with others collected by Ms. Malone, at the National Museum of Ireland. Niall Carson/Press Association, via Getty Images; Paulo Nunes dos Santos for The New York Times

Rapid-response collecting was pioneered by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In 2014, it opened a gallery dedicated to objects acquired after they stirred public debate or looked likely to have historical impact. The museum says it hopes they provoke discussion about how objects are changing the way we live.

Current exhibits include a burkini, the swimwear used by some Muslim women, which some in Europe have tried to ban; a campaign leaflet used in Britain's referendum on whether to leave the European Union; and a 3D-printed gun, acquired after these weapons stirred a panic in Britain in 2013.

Corinna Gardner, a senior curator at the museum, said she received regular requests from other museums to borrow such items. She also said that other institutions had asked her for advice about how to develop their own rapid-response programs.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, the deputy director of the Jewish Museum Berlin, said in a telephone interview that she was "intrigued by the rapid-response approach of the V&A." She said that her museum had followed suit and had begun acquiring objects that had figured prominently in current affairs.

In April, Ms. Meijer-van Mensch said she had tried to obtain the trophy for album of the year that was given to two rappers at Germany's Echo Music Awards. The accolade prompted an outcrybecause some of the musicians' lyrics were said to be anti-Semitic. But Ms. Meijer-van Mensch said efforts to get hold of the trophy had been in vain.

Just days after the furor over the German music awards, two men wearing Jewish skullcaps, or kipas, were attacked in an affluent neighborhood of Berlin by a man wielding a belt. One of the men, who is from Israel but is not Jewish, said he had worn the skullcap to prove to a friend that he could wear one in Berlin without being harassed.

The incident kicked off a debate about the extent of anti-Semitism in Germany, culminating in a demonstration in Berlin by kipa-wearing protesters. “I was intrigued by the enormous aftermath of this,” Ms. Meijer-van Mensch said. “I thought I needed to go to this with a photographer, and I needed to collect objects.” She clambered up walls at the protest to obtain posters, and afterwards tracked down one of the men who was attacked to get his kipa for the museum. “It was actually quite fun — guerrilla collecting in a way. It’s very different to normal,” she said.

The kipa and other objects went on display in the Jewish Museum on May 31.

Ms. Meijer-van Mensch said she wanted the display to be the first in a series that brought topical objects quickly to the museum. But she said she wanted to collect works beyond those related to controversies about anti-Semitism. For example, she said, she is considering documenting a gay Jewish wedding.

The kipa worn by a man who was attacked in Berlin in April. The incident fueled a debate in Germany about the extent of anti-Semitism in the country. Yves Sucksdorff/Jewish Museum Berlin

Ms. Meijer-van Mensch said she realized that many of the objects collected in rapid-response programs were associated with left-wing causes and could therefore open museums to accusations of political bias. But she said that a museum was “never a neutral, objective space.” If institutions supported the causes of particular activists, they should at least be transparent about it, she said.

Ms. Malone of the National Museum of Ireland said that she had gone on marches calling for a change in the country's abortion laws for years, but that her views were irrelevant to her work. "The museum is nonpolitical, and my job is to research this moment in history, not how I feel about it," she said.

No anti-abortion campaigners had yet sent the museum a banner, she said. (She had to climb up lampposts herself to secure those.)

Ms. Gardner of the V&A agreed that politics could be an issue, but she said that all items in the Victoria and Albert Museum were presented factually, and that visitors were encouraged to make up their own minds about them.

Ms. Malone said she did not know when the referendum banners she was collecting would go on display. More space in the museum and more varied examples were needed before that could happen, she said.

Nonetheless, she said she was planning soon to make a 200-mile round trip to Roscommon, a rural area in the middle of Ireland. She plans to pick up a banner, "Roscommon Farmers 4 Yes," that supported the repeal of the abortion ban. The region voted against the legalization of gay marriage in another referendum in 2015. Ms. Malone said the banner seemed to show how quickly social attitudes in Ireland were changing.

"I think rapid-response collecting is one of the most exciting things a curator can do," Ms. Malone said. "It's current, and you get to go out there into the community, and there is a real opportunity for Irish people to say, 'This is what we want remembered.'

"I think it is really what makes a national museum relevant to today."

Politics (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/politics)

Signs of the Times: Museums Are Collecting Protest Posters From the 2018 Women's March

Curators focused on themes that have emerged since the 2017 march, such as DACA and #TimesUp.

Sarah Cascone (https://news.artnet.com/about/sarah-cascone-25), January 22, 2018

A crowd of people participating in the Women's March makes its way down Sixth Avenue in Manhattan on January 20, 2018. Photo courtesy of Stephanie Keith/Getty Images.

SHARE

A year into the presidency of Donald Trump, the resistance movement is still proving strong as thousands gathered across the country this past Saturday for the second Women's March.

Of the many thousands of protest signs (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/womens-march-images-art-world-826481) that proclaimed opposition to Trump and his anti-woman, anti-immigrant rhetoric—which led to a legit poster board shortage (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/best-way-fight-donald-trump-open-art-supply-store-900932) in the US—a select few are destined for posterity, thanks to the forward-thinking curators at institutions (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/museums-collecting-womens-march-signs_us_58863477e4b096b4a23332c9) such as the New-York Historical Society (http://www.nyhistory.org/), the Museum of the City of New York (http://www.mcny.org/), and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (http://americanhistory.si.edu/press/releases/statement-political-history) in Washington, DC.

Elaine Maas, sign for the Women's March on New York City (2017). Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

"We were very energetic collectors of the initial Women's March last year, and we wanted to follow up and add to that collection," New-York Historical Society vice president and director Margi Hofer told artnet News, noting that staff members were collecting with an eye toward material that reflected changes over the past year, such as signs referencing #MeToo (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artist-visualization-metoo-hashtag-1140728) and #TimesUp, or the "Power to the Polls" movement in the run-up to midterm elections.

"The blue wave motif was very omnipresent and new to this year's march," she added. "The idea is representing the power of Democratic voters."

We Make America signs at the New York Women's March in 2018. Photo courtesy of Deborah Stein.

The artist collective We Make America (https://www.facebook.com/groups/219931538432583), which counts feminist artist Joyce Kozloff (http://www.artnet.com/artists/joyce-kozloff/) among its leaders, created an elaborate tableaux of blue waves and "Pussy Gate" signs as they took to the street in New York this weekend. The group also donated Statue of Liberty-themed signs to the Historical Society following last year's march.

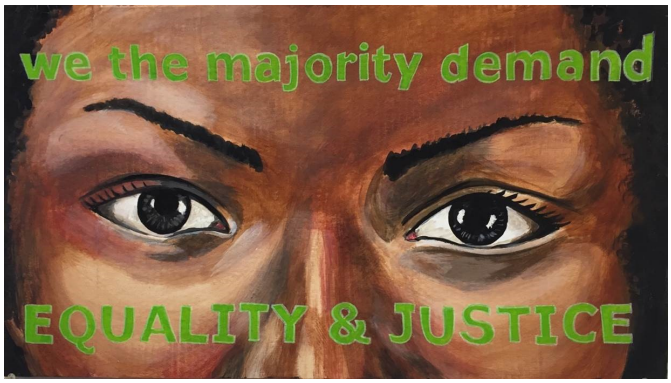
This time around, the Historical Society also selected signs in support of immigrants and the extension of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, protecting undocumented immigrants who arrived in the US as children.

A woman photographs signs left in Lafayette Square after the Women's March on Washington in 2018. Photo courtesy of Andrew Caballero-ReynoldsAFP/Getty Images.

One trend you likely won't see in upcoming exhibitions? Posters replacing Trump's mouth with a less savory part of the anatomy—a common reference to the controversial, derogatory term he allegedly used to refer

to Haiti and other countries. “Our focus is more on showing how people are mobilizing in positive ways rather than simply signs that are being critical of his remarks,” said Hofer. “Our primary concern is capturing this moment for future generations.”

There are no immediate plans to exhibit artifacts from the 2018 marches, but “Collecting the Women’s Marches (http://www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/collecting-women%E2%80%99s-marches),” featuring pussyhats (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/pussyhats-womens-march-art-829571), signs, posters, and photographs from last year’s event, opened at the New-York Historical Society on Friday. “It really captures the energy and the creativity around that event,” said Hofer.



Women’s March poster (2017). Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.

You can also catch posters and other objects from New York’s 2017 march at the Museum of the City of New York in “Beyond Suffrage: A Century of New York Women in Politics (http://www.mcny.org/exhibition/beyond-suffrage).” As it does with other major activist events, the museum solicited donations of objects following the march.

In honor of the protest’s one-year anniversary, the museum posted a video on Twitter of marchers carrying a parachute that honored historic feminists at the march. The parachute is among the highlights (https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/beyond-suffrage-museum-new-york-1127276) of the current exhibition, which includes other Women’s March signs. A representative of the museum told artnet News in an email that there were no set plans to collect additional materials from the 2018 march.

Museum of the City of NY
@MuseumofCityNY

Held aloft at the 2017 NYC Women’s March, this parachute representing collaboration and inclusion is now on display as part of our exhibition #BeyondSuffrage. bit.ly/2fujRFB

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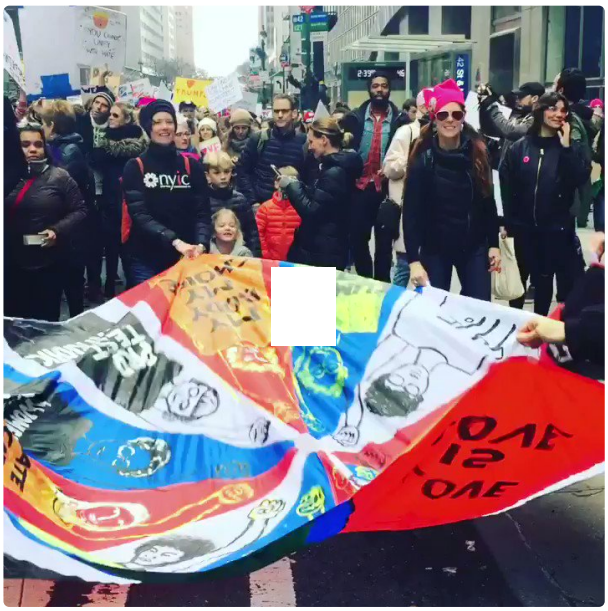

13 11:00 AM - Jan 22, 2018 · Manhattan, NY

See Museum of the City of NY's other Tweets

In DC, the Smithsonian's American History museum amassed about 30 posters and 20 other objects from the city's march, making an effort to represent the various different issues being addressed by protesters. A "Black Lives Matter" poster from the 2017 march is currently on view in the museum's "American Democracy" exhibition.

"The museum has a long history, stretching back to the [1963] March on Washington, of collecting materials from protests, and rallies, and marches, and those occasions when citizens get together to make their voices heard, and exercise their First Amendment rights," Lisa Kathleen Graddy, a curator in the museum's political history division, told the Cut (https://www.thecut.com/2018/01/womens-march-signs-smithsonian-museum.html) last week. Because of the government shutdown (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/smithsonian-open-government-shutdown-1203851), Graddy wasn't available for comment today, but the museum had plans to collect artifacts in DC this past weekend.

See more photos from the 2018 Women's March below, as well as artifacts from the 2017 march, now in the collection of the New-York Historical Society.

(https://news.artnet.com/art-world/collecting-2020-black-lives-matter-protests-1878480)

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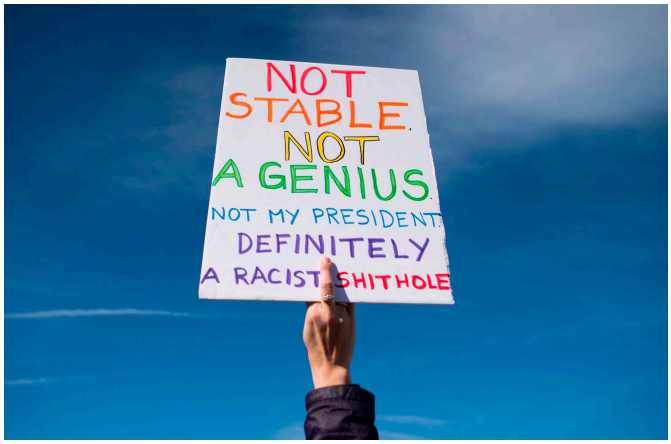
(https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/ann-shelton-botanical-abortifacient-photos-1549537)

Demonstrators seen during the 2018 Women's March in New York City on January 20. Photo courtesy of John Lamparski/Getty Images.



A woman holds up a sign during the Women's March on Washington DC, 2018. Photo courtesy of Andrew Caballero-ReynoldsAFP/Getty Images.

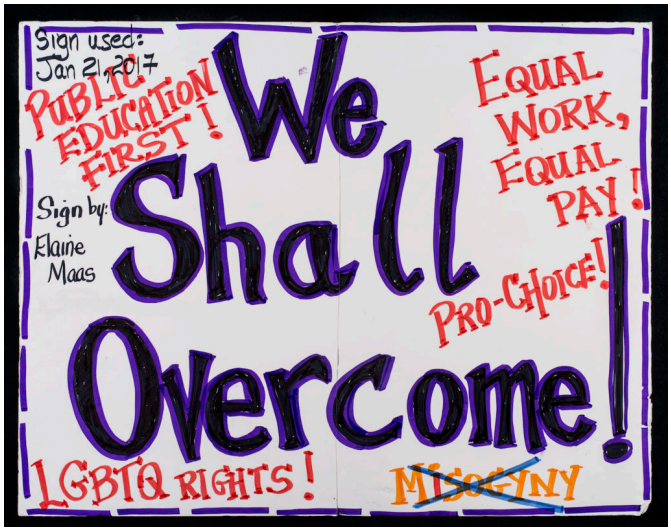
Protesters, part of a 500,000-strong crowd in Los Angeles, raise their hands during the Women's Rally on the one-year anniversary of the first Women's March, when millions marched around the world to protest US President Donald Trump's inauguration. Photo courtesy of Mark Ralston/AFP/Getty Images.

People gather at the Lincoln Memorial reflecting pool to rally before the Women's March on January 20, 2018, in Washington, DC. Photo courtesy of Alex Wroblewski/Getty Images.

A large crowd participating in the Women's March makes its way down Sixth Avenue in Manhattan on January 20, 2018. Photo courtesy of Stephanie Keith/Getty Images.

Lori Steinberg, Pussyhat worn at Women's March on Washington (2017). Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

Jen Keenan, poster for the Women's March on Washington, New York City Chapter (2017). Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.



Elaine Maas, Sign for Women's March on New York City (2017). Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

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COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP

Information PLEASE Preserving History as It Happens: Orange County Regional History Center undertook rapid-response collecting after Pulse nightclub shooting

Posted on May 1, 2018

Quick Conservation Setup and Van at Pulse_preview

Pamela Schwartz, Chief Curator, Orange Country Regional History Center

This article originally appeared in the May/June 2018 issue of Museum magazine.

On June 12, 2016, a home-grown terrorist entered Orlando's Pulse nightclub during Latin Night after last call. He murdered 49 beautiful individuals, injured another 68, and caused severe mental trauma to hundreds more people.

It was the largest American attack on the LGBTQ community and, at the time, the country's deadliest mass shooting by a lone gunman in modern history. Sadly, it took only 16 months for Orlando to pass that grim distinction on to Las Vegas.

Unfortunately, instances of mass violence are becoming increasingly common. Museums, therefore, are wise to understand and prepare for what role they might play should the unimaginable happen in their community.

When It Happens to You

I read about the massacre that following morning, curled up on the couch with my dog. I had been at the Orange County Regional History Center for just five months. Though the reported number of people murdered had not yet climbed to 49, I knew this was going to be a major event in Orlando's history, and likely national history.

I thought about the spontaneous memorials that would grow, the grieving families, the stories the survivors would carry with them the rest of their lives. While police investigated and doctors saved lives, I began writing the initial five-page plan for what would become the One Orlando Collection Initiative.

This initial plan, while rough, outlined the necessity and strategy for immediate action. It recommended beginning collecting as soon as possible—before the merciless Florida summer sun and rain disintegrated items—and creating new staff positions to process this collection. Most important, I felt our institution should be the repository of Pulse-related artifacts, keeping this collection at home in Orlando.

Forging Ahead

After two weeks of agonizing and agitating in an incredibly sensitive political atmosphere with decision makers who minimally understood museum work, we received the necessary permissions to begin collecting from each of the four temporary memorial sites. For 31 days, our five staff members collected items from the memorials based on specific criteria: physical condition, duration of time at the memorial, individuality, unique connections to our specific event, and heart-rending messages. We quickly created processes for field conservation, which involved removing bugs and dead flower petals, mitigating mold, and extracting moisture using a makeshift press.

Because no city is prepared for such an outpouring of emotion, we also found ourselves the custodians of the sites, picking up broken glass from votives, scraping away melted wax that became a slipping hazard, and clearing away rotting flowers and stagnant water in a summer of Zika virus threats. If we collected an artifact, we tidied up and filled the void with others from the perimeter of the space. This work was both physically exhausting and emotionally draining for the staff.

Collecting went beyond the memorials to include objects of international origin, artistic responses, and even items from within the nightclub itself. The clothing of a victim, a bullet-torn door from the bathroom where people were held hostage, and the cabinet within which people hid are all part of this historic narrative. They may seem gruesome now, but in 200 years, they will be the primary evidence of the atrocity in Orlando.

The first victim's family I met with was only in Orlando for the weekend, arriving from out of state to clean out their daughter's apartment. They were not prepared to go to the memorial sites, especially not Pulse itself. They were not ready to see the thousands of items that signified the death of their loved one, and they certainly didn't wish to share their mourning with the world. They came to us, hoping we might offer a small, private audience for them with some of their daughter's tributes—and we did.

I realized that day that many of the people most affected by this event were not in Orlando. They were not witnessing the incredible outpouring of love and support from #OrlandoUnited. So, we created an online memorial so that anybody anywhere could see the events and vigils, the memorial items, and even documentation of our conservation process. This online presence garnered more visitors in weeks than our site had in entire years.

For the one-year remembrance, we designed a 3,200-square-foot exhibition, which was our first one crafted completely from our own collection and the first to be entirely bilingual (English and Spanish). We labored over the interpretation of a recent historic event that was still an open investigation: what vocabulary to use, which artifacts to show, and which items were still too raw. We chose to reflect on the individuals affected and on the community's response to the shooting. We kept text to a minimum, with mostly section theme-level detail; we knew most of the photographs, artwork, and artifacts could speak for themselves.

We held private previews for more than 600 survivors and family members of the victims, many of whom were first-time visitors. Individuals ached to connect with the artifacts they had seen at the memorial sites, artifacts that would have otherwise perished in the sun and rain, and to know their stories were being preserved.

Currently, we have cataloged and conserved more than 7,000 artifacts and photographs (with more to go), conducted nearly 160 oral histories, and held two exhibitions related to the event. While much of America has moved on, Orlando is still figuring out how to heal, how to remember, and the lasting impact of a single day on our community.

Unanticipated Outcomes

We began this collecting endeavor with two things in mind: our museum's mission and collecting a specific event. However, the following unanticipated (and mostly positive) outcomes are now shaping how we see our role as museum staff and how we operate as an institution.

- As we were in the field collecting and interacting with community members, we educated our public about what good and inclusive museum work looks like.
- We made connections with communities (Latinx, African American, Muslim, LGBTQ, and more) with whom we had not previously worked in-depth.
- We grew and diversified our historically privileged collection, which mainly focused on white males.
- We helped our community heal.

This last outcome has been the most important for us. We have provided a meaningful type of therapy for our community by allowing mourning LGBTQ youth nationally to feel the love and support of the community through the online memorial, showing family members that their loved one's life would not be forgotten, and inviting survivors to record an oral history and share their unabridged story.

Museums need to begin fulfilling a greater purpose. Simply educating with historical fact isn't enough. Museums can provide real-time connections for individuals, helping them see themselves as a part of history and understand their ability to shape the future.

Creating a Different Kind of Emergency Plan

Most emergency management plans are centered on protecting your staff or your collection in the case of a disaster—usually natural—within the workplace. In addition to those plans, museums should consider how they would respond to and collect for a mass trauma event in their community. Following are some questions institutions might ask themselves if such a situation arises.

1. Does collecting this event fit the mission of our institution?
2. Do we have the resources (time, money, supplies) it will require?
3. Can we keep our staff, existing collections, and institution healthy and safe? In particular, how will we deal with the mental health needs of collecting staff?
4. What permissions do we need to begin a collecting endeavor?
5. What will we collect and how much of it?
6. If we could collect only the 15 most important items from this event, what would they be?

Pamela Schwartz is the chief curator at the Orange County Regional History Center in Orlando, Florida. Contact her at pamela.schwartz@ocfl.net with any questions about rapid-response collecting.

This article originally appeared in the May/June 2018 issue of Museum Magazine. Download the original PDF for offline reading.

Pamela Schwartz, Chief Curator, Orange Country Regional History Cent

https://www.aam-us.org/2018/05/01/information-please-preserving-history-as-it-happens-the-orange-county-regional-history-center-undertook-rapid-response-collecting-after-the-pulse-nightclub-shooting/

What was it like to live through the pandemic, grandpa? University archives seek items that capture COVID-19 history

By Caroline Enos Globe Correspondent,Updated June 26, 2020, 9:06 a.m.

Cambridge resident Emily Ottinger submitted several paintings to Harvard University's COVID-19 Community Archiving Project, including this one, which she created based on photos of masked people around Cambridge and Boston. EMILY OTTINGER

In late March, with the world entering a coronavirus lockdown and his friends panicking, Emerson College senior Jack Lavitz worried about what would happen next — and its impact on his generation.

"What will happen in the coming months is definitely uncertain as we can see, but what happens in our futures is directly correlated to this," Lavitz wrote in a reflection he submitted to Emerson's COVID-19 archive project in late March. "For now, all we can do is really hope for the best, but for us, is that good enough?"

Lavitz had just had his time at Emerson's Los Angeles campus curtailed by COVID-19. He suddenly had to choose between waiting out the storm there and finding an apartment, or going back home to New Jersey for the last months of his college career.

He described what it was like making that decision in his essay, which is one of the many artifacts of history that archivists at universities around the region are collecting from students, faculty, and staff to document these terrible times.

Someday they could help answer the question: What was it like to live through the pandemic?

"We want to capture voices, and I think this can be empowering for students who contribute," said Christian Dupont, an associate librarian for Special Collections at Boston College. "They can see that their life matters and somebody else will care about what they went through."

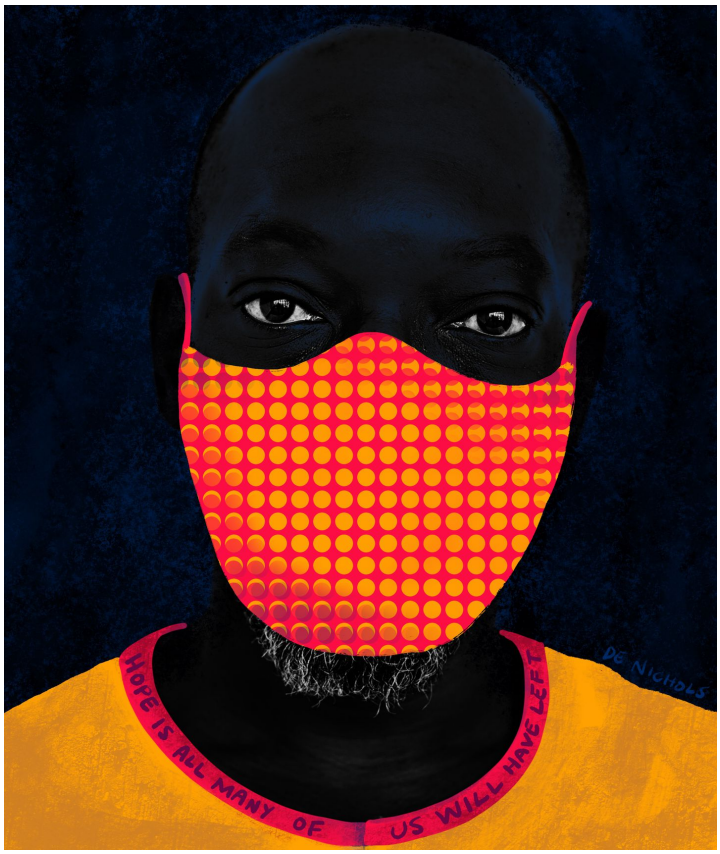
The submissions include art, essays, photographs, original songs — anything that depicts this moment in history from the perspectives of college communities.

Some contributions have been less than dramatic, including notices from school officials and student groups about COVID-19's effect on campus events and classes. But some are far more personal.

De Nichols, a Loeb Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, submitted a digital drawing to Harvard University's COVID-19 Community Archiving Project that she created to honor a friend who died due to complications from the virus. The piece has also been printed out and displayed on one of the windows of Harvard's Science Center as part of the Windows at Harvard public art project.

"The most moving for me are videos of students talking to each other or just directly to the camera as they try to make some sense of the situation or say goodbye to each other,"said Dan Santamaria, director of Digital Collections and Archives at Tufts University. "Many of the videos really emphasize how quickly everything happened in March."

Some students have used photography as a way to capture the sudden shift in their lives. Archives have received photographs of students' tiny apartments or cluttered bedrooms, which suddenly served as their study and work spaces, as well as images of the lockdown landscape — the lines outside supermarkets and empty Boston streets — the students navigated.



Harvard Graduate School of Design Loeb Fellow De Nichols submitted this digital drawing to Harvard University's COVID-19 Community Archiving Project, which she created after learning a friend had died due to complications from COVID-19.DE NICHOLS

Emilie Hardman, head of Distinctive Collections at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's libraries, said students also have submitted music playlists they made after finding out their semester had been cut short.

Harvard University graduate student Sam Naylor submitted this photo of his quarantine location, a small Cambridge apartment he shares with his partner, to Harvard's COVID-19 Community Archiving Project. SAM NAYLOR

"I can imagine that there are students who were packing up their senior year dorms, realizing that they were unlikely to have a traditional graduation, hurriedly ending their college careers, and listening to songs that may for the rest of their lives evoke that unique experience," Hardman said.

One student at Tufts submitted a song called "COVID Funk," which parodies the Bruno Mars hit "Uptown Funk." At Berklee College of Music, archivists have received original songs from students like Madison Simpson, who graduated from Berklee this spring with a degree in professional music.

Simpson wrote a folk-style vocal composition about how hard it has been since COVID-19 cut the last few months of her college life short, especially since she can no longer see her friends in person. She wrote, in part:

Walking round in circles like a lost dog far from home

Missing all these things that I've forgotten how to know

Crowded in this house but all alone

A cannon at Tufts University was painted with the words "COVID 2020, Class of 2020." The cannon is painted frequently, often with messages from students. Ana Sophia Acosta, a member of the Class of 2020 at Tufts, submitted this photo to the Tufts Digital Collections and Archives COVID-19 Documentation project. ANA SOPHIA ACOSTA

Archivists hope these submissions will help historians, policymakers, and future generations understand just how trying this pandemic was for young people.

“Not only will their contributions have enduring historical value, their [submissions] will also provide insight on how we can better support students as a university,” said Julia Howington, director of the Moakley Archive and Institute at Suffolk University.

While most university archives have started their own projects, Suffolk is taking part in The Year of the Plague, a crowd-sourced archive that is accepting submissions related to COVID-19 from around the world.

Northeastern University also is contributing works to The Year of the Plague, which has received more than 5,600 items as of June 23. Victoria Cain, director of Graduate Studies at Northeastern’s Department of History, said submissions could help their creators find a sense of purpose during this pandemic.

“I think it’s very easy to feel unmoored and untethered, and there’s something grounding about explaining and articulating where you are and what is important to you at that moment,” Cain said.

Dupont said submissions to BC’s archives will be used in future courses at the college. He hopes students from universities across the city will preserve their pandemic experiences through archival projects.

“Get in touch with an organization you’re affiliated with and ask them for their advice on how to share your story and archive it,” Dupont said. “If you have a story to share, somebody wants it.”

The archivists said they would welcome more submissions as the pandemic continues and will even accept them after it’s all over.

Lavitz, who is in the process of moving back to Los Angeles after finishing the semester in New Jersey, said he is glad he submitted his story to Emerson’s archives.

“Sharing my experience [with the archives] let me talk out what had happened and why it happened,” Lavitz said. “Deciding what to do once Emerson told us we had to leave was such a trying experience and something I’ll never forget.”

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https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/26/metro/what-was-it-like-live-through-pandemic-grandpa-university-archives-seek-items-that-capture-covid-19-history/