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Article: Library and Archives Conservation Discussion Group 2022: Reparations, Restitution, and Post-Custodial Realities in the Library and Archive: What Is Conservation's Role?

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Library and Archives Conservation Discussion Group 2022 Reparations, Restitution, and Post-Custodial Realities in the Library and Archive: What Is Conservation's Role?

INTRODUCTION

The Library and Archives Conservation Discussion Group (LACDG) held its first in-person meeting presentation and open discussion session during AIC's 50th Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, California. The theme, "Reparations, Restitution, and Post-Custodial Realities in the Library and Archive" was inspired by current events and aimed to explore questions around conservation's role when working with collections appropriated through conquest, theft, and/or colonialism. To provide a springboard for the open discussion, a panel of three speakers gave short presentations that included an overview of protocols for working with Native American archival materials, the post-custodial archival approach to collections, and two case studies involving repatriated library materials. An engaging open discussion with the audience and speakers followed the talks.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

JO ANNE MARTINEZ-KILGORE PROTOCOLS FOR NATIVE AMERICAN ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

The First Archivist Circle developed the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* in 2006 with the following aims:

- Inform archives professionals as they manage, preserve, and provide access to Native American materials and content
- Provide guidance and tools to establish collaboration with Native American communities with a foundation of mutual respect

Summary of discussion groups at the Book and Paper Group Session, AIC's 50th Annual Meeting, May 13–18, 2022, Los Angeles, California

- Set standards to find a balance between the goals of collecting institutions to provide access and the imperative of native cultures to protect their cultural patrimony
- Reframe the understanding of collections to incorporate Native American perspectives.

Conservators and archivists share a basic responsibility to identify, preserve, and understand Native American materials appropriately.

Jo Anne Martinez-Kilgore, Conservator, Arizona State Library, Archives, & Public Records

ERIN HAMMEKE POST-CUSTODIAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CONSERVATION

A post-custodial or non-custodial approach to collecting may be adopted for a variety of reasons. The lack of diverse representation in many institutional collections, combined with well-justified trust issues between some source communities and memory institutions, logistical challenges, and also changing views of custody in general, have all prompted an interest in exploring post-custodial practices. This talk explored the current landscape of post-custodial archival collections by presenting examples from a spectrum of custodial arrangements found in large- to small-scale archival projects and collaborations. It concluded by offering references for more information and further research.

Erin Hammeke, Senior Conservator for Special Collections, Duke University Libraries

CONSUELA (CHELA) METZGER REPATRIATION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: TWO RECENT CONSERVATION EXPERIENCES

In the last two years at UCLA Library, two European groups looked in Hathi Trust and found library stamps

on books from libraries looted and closed by the Nazis. These library stamps from looted and closed libraries were found on materials in UCLA Library circulating collections. Conservation was asked to evaluate the books and potentially repair the damage. Conservation services that could “mitigate” or “erase” marks of UCLA ownership were casually offered to the European groups requesting the books without first consulting with Conservation. Conservation in both cases noted that this would cause damage to the books and would make provenance history unclear. The first repatriation incident did not involve subject specialists, and the single book was examined by conservation and returned to Europe with no fanfare. The second incident involved subject specialists from the beginning and the group in Europe requested six titles returned. The second incident involved conservation, cataloging, selectors from Judaica and Hebraica, imaging services, and two embassies. The second repatriation event generated a symposium on repatriation issues.¹ As collections are fully available in digital form, those looking for library materials from collections looted by the Nazis may find the materials in US academic libraries. Is there a way we can collaborate internationally in a proactive way? Should academic library conservation departments put policies in place for the treatment of materials to be repatriated?

Consuela (Chela) Metzger, Head of Preservation & Conservation, UCLA Libraries

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

BY CONSUELA (CHELA) METZGER

Because two of the speakers, Consuela (Chela) Metzger and Jo-Anne Kilgore-Martinez, were there in person, most of the questions were directed to them. There was a clear interest in the excellent presentation Erin Hammeke gave on trends in non-custodial collecting, and there were many requests for her references, which are shared in the “further reading” section at the end of this summary.

A few statements from the discussion group participants pertained to all three talks. There was a statement that these talks all focused on the code of ethics and that ethics is an important theme to keep revisiting. There were several statements on the underlying capitalist and colonial ideas of ownership that have influenced American libraries, museums, and archives. There was a statement that the kinds of thinking expressed in the talks were in some ways piecemeal, and a more structurally appropriate and radical endpoint could be to fully empower communities to take complete responsibility for their materials, and in a sense, erase ourselves as experts and gatekeepers. Other participants noted that outreach and advocacy were an essential part of conservation work. On the related topic of the provenance of archeological materials, a conservator who handles papyrus collections noted that no

treatment work should be done on any materials related to archeological excavations, and library and archive conservators need to learn more about provenance issues in general, and there is a new and very useful area in the AIC Wiki devoted to the topic.

Questions and statements related to “Repatriation in Academic Libraries, Two Recent Conservation Experiences” for Consuela (Chela) Metzger

There were several questions about legal issues, specifically if the speaker had contacted their university’s legal counsel about the material being repatriated. The speaker noted that these repatriation efforts to date had not involved lawyers and were taken care of librarian-to-librarian, perhaps because the materials were circulating collection materials.

There were questions about how the repatriation path differed depending on who was the first point of contact at the library for the repatriation process. Since the UCLA Library to date does not have one designated person to handle repatriation requests, those different paths through the system may continue. However, at this point, Hebraica and Judaica librarians are actively looking for library stamps on materials that show European Jewish ownership in order to repatriate those materials. One person asked about sharing any past conservation treatment with the original owner. Since these were circulating collection materials, no treatment documentation existed.

There was a question about any religious restrictions on handling the Jewish materials. The speaker was not able to address this question as the materials they presented on were academic, not sacred.

There was a question about the digitization of these repatriated books. Since the rightful custodians in Europe found their material with their library stamps by looking at digitized library material online, these books are all available online in HathiTrust and other repositories.

There were questions about permissions for conservators to talk about repatriation publicly, and the speaker noted that a conference was happening at UCLA Library concurrently with AIC on the topic of the repatriation, and all involved were collaborating.

There was a question about taking a published digitized book out of the public digital domain if requested, and the speaker thought that could be a complex request for a public institution.

One participant questioned the UCLA Library’s use of the Benin Bronzes as a visual in their advertising for a repatriation conference—was it appropriate to equate the return of the Bronzes to the return of published library books stolen by the Nazis? The participant charged AIC with making careful distinctions between Repatriation, Restitution, and other issues of social justice and collections.

Questions and statements related to Protocols for Native American Materials for Jo Anne Martinez-Kilgore

There was a question about the problems of enacting the *Protocols for Native American Materials* in a State Archive setting, where budget and oversight are so tied to state government. The speakers said that in some cases state archivists had assumed the materials were just dry records, and not subject to the *Protocols*, but there may be more complexity than they realize, and she urged those in state archives to be knowledgeable about those complexities. The speaker was concerned that the More Product Less Process (MPLP) push in many archives could make attention to content details that the *Protocols* require controversial. There was a concern about ownership of materials in state archives and how state ownership mapped with tribal ownership. The speaker noted that the *Protocols* for archives were written in 2006 and adopted in 2018, so not all archives are as familiar with them as they might need to be. She pointed to the ongoing goal of the *Protocols* as collaborative communication with Tribes, which was a complex process.

There was a question about any experiences using the *Protocols* in the speaker's work. The speaker noted receiving many phone calls from tribal members working with collections. She helps host an archives summit every year and has worked to get a panel together of Tribal speakers. She noted there was lots of room for growth in working with the *Protocols*.

There was a question from a conservator at a regional center who wondered about ownership/*Protocols* issues for treating the "incorporating" documents of towns that may have originally involved Tribal members in their "incorporation." Who "owns" these documents? Was there a place on the AIC website to help guide library and archives conservators when faced with ownership issues that may touch on *Protocols*? The speaker thought some portal on AIC for the *Protocols* could be a good idea. She notes her ideas of being "content neutral" had changed over time and changed how she approached treatments.

There was a question about collections that are a mix of archival documents and 3D objects related to Tribal life. The speaker notes that the School of Advanced Research Guidelines are fairly specific on *Protocols* for objects, and the bedrock of all work with these materials is building relationships and mutual respect.

There was a question about an institutional conservator's role in limiting or refusing to allow Tribal members today to physically use institutionally held Tribal materials for ceremonies. The speaker noted that she did not work in an archive with objects. She reminded the audience all the tribes have their own different relationship with objects in institutions, and if curators and librarians were uninformed or actively discouraging Tribal relationships to their

materials, conservators may need to be advocates and allies with the Tribes, if appropriate, but this needs to be on a tribe by tribe basis.

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NOTE

1. More information on this symposium can be found at <https://guides.library.ucla.edu/repatriationsymposium>

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