Paradigms & Possibilities of Incarceration-Related Records

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PARADIGMS & POSSIBILITIES OF INCARCERATION-RELATED RECORDS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can archivists resist replicating oppressive structures of power in the stewardship of incarceration-related records?

How can these records serve and engage their communities of origin?

Incarceration-related records: documents; letters; photographs; recordings; meeting minutes; and other material that may specify or allude to subjects/creators’ corrections & criminal justice backgrounds

CHALLENGES & CONSIDERATIONS

Official records legally have clearer guidelines/call for less discretion; how do we navigate materials that fall in the grey area?

Tensions: original intention; consent of creators; means of provenance, confidentiality; research value; ethical use; contemporary/recent records

Goals:
• Means of access that are sustainable for staff, effective for researchers, and respectful of subjects
• To include these narratives in the archival record while at the same time honoring agency and privacy in their preservation and accessibility

ACCESS & REDACTION OPTIONS

Policies for incarceration/crinality-related collections at other institutions:
• Researchers must present/submit research intentions
• Consent forms and identification required for access
• Redaction is conducted as individual documents are requested, sometimes at cost to the researcher; digitization is limited; on-site appointments required

While these policies are in place to protect identifying information, in their rigid requirements and institutional nature they may discourage and prevent access by some of the very communities we aim to reach.

Critiques of redaction: subjective; difficult, esp. with inconsistent records; hinders statistical/genealogical research

CONCLUSIONS

Sections of the collection remain closed prior to being reviewed for best options for redaction, if possible. Sensitive photographs weeded upon accession.

Presents opportunities to engage with researchers and students about archival ethics and methods

We can continue to learn from invested community members as we work to process and accurately contextualize the collection and oral history project and enhance its accessibility.

ORAL ADDITIONS

First-person retrospectives build upon physical materials to present a more complete historical record, function to locate subjectivities as valid and integral sources of knowledge, and serve to include impacted and represented community members in the archival process.

We are exploring ways to encourage participation through avenues of self-submission and options for anonymity in recordings and transcripts. This project has depended on promotion and volunteerism by former clients and staff that are passionate about this collection.

LOOKING FORWARD

How can this collection serve incarcerated individuals? Archival instruction & “Inside Our” teaching programs?

Students, service providers, and former clients/staff referring to resources and information in the collection in plans to develop a revisioning and reopening of the organization

REFERENCES/RECOMMENDED READING


Photos from the Carole Pope & ONB Collection