

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Multiverse,” <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/123653>, citing *Science Fiction Studies*, November 1993.
- <sup>2</sup> The Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI), Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (PACG), “Educating for the Archival Multiverse,” *The American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 69–101. See also Anne J. Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, “Pluralising the Archives in the Multiverse: A Report on Work in Progress,” *Atlanti* 21 (2011): 177–85; Anne J. Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, “Recordkeeping Metadata, the Archival Multiverse, and Societal Grand Challenges,” in *DCMI '12: Proceedings of the 2012 International Conference on Dublin Core and Metadata Applications* (New York: ACM Press, 2012), 106–15.
- <sup>3</sup> Gilliland and McKemmish, “Pluralising the Archives,” 182.
- <sup>4</sup> See <http://www.oopen.org/search?identifier=628143>. A few chapters are omitted from the open access PDF version of the book.

## North of Dixie: Civil Rights Photography Beyond the South

By Mark Speltz with a preface by Deborah Willis. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016. 160 pp. Hardcover. \$35.00. ISBN 978-1-60-606505-1.

While historian Mark Speltz’s book, *North of Dixie: Civil Rights Photography Beyond the South*, is not explicitly written for an archival audience, his words apply directly to principles of diversity and inclusion in archives. Choosing a hundred photographs to support and illustrate his argument, Speltz aims to “recast the visual narrative of the [civil rights] era by bringing the broad, nationwide struggle for black freedom into sharper view” (p. 3). Speltz succeeds in this endeavor, bringing to light civil rights photos largely ignored or even undiscovered. Focusing on these images from the North, he offers a comprehensive perspective on the stereotypical civil-rights-era representations of poverty and criminality in the South. As archivists grapple with defining diversity and consider issues of power and authority, *North of Dixie* makes a significant contribution to this conversation.

Organized chronologically, each of the four chapters, “Northern Underexposure” (chapter 1), “The Battle for Self-Representation” (chapter 2), “Black Power and Beyond” (chapter 3), and “Surveillance and Repression” (chapter 4), include succinct (about five pages) write-ups that contextualize the black-and-white photographs. Speltz effectively tracks the changing themes and use of photography of civil rights activities by over fifty photographers in more than twenty-five cities in the northern United States between 1938 and 1975. In particular, the photographs depict poor conditions in black neighborhoods, campaigns and demonstrations against racial discrimination, protests against

exclusionary hiring practices, economic disparities, activists, counterprotestors, racist signs, segregated schools and restaurants, victims of police brutality, police lineups, politicians, mugshot books, and civil rights leaders. A significant number of photos document the community-based efforts of the NAACP and the Black Panther Party as well as nationally recognized protests, including the Chicago Freedom Movement and the Detroit Walk to Freedom demonstration (a subject of the recently released film *Detroit*).<sup>1</sup>

Much of Speltz's success lies in his selection of photographs: unearthed through extensive research and culled from numerous archives (particularly the J. Paul Getty Museum Archives), he presents photos both by professional photographers and unknown activists and bystanders, thus providing greater access to varying viewpoints, authorities, and interpretations. The images taken by established professionals, including Bob Adelman, Gordon Parks, Leonard Freed, Art Shay, and John Vachon, display refined photographic compositions and include images of famous civil rights leaders and celebrities, namely Martin Luther King Jr., Carl Stokes (the first African American mayor of a major city—Cleveland), Malcolm X, and poet Nikki Giovanni. However, the photos by unidentified or “everyday” people, many of which are unfamiliar and previously unpublished, arguably have a greater impact: they bring the intimate and raw viewpoints of the underrepresented to light.

This idea of broadening the narrative to illuminate diverse perspectives is a discussion archivists are increasingly engaging with, as seen in the profession's shifting efforts to create more expansive and inclusive archives. This issue unavoidably invites introspection of our own values, beliefs, and professional competencies. Archival literature and presentations struggling to define what our responsibilities are in this arena have lately exploded. Notably, SAA's recent publication, *Through the Archival Looking Glass: A Reader on Diversity and Inclusion* (2014), edited by Mary Caldera and Kathryn M. Neal, and multiple panels at the 2017 SAA Annual Meeting in Portland were devoted to this topic.<sup>2</sup> Speltz's book encourages us to question and reflect on collecting and descriptive practices: How do we create “neutral” and “objective” archives? Is this possible? Do archivists have a responsibility to do so? What authority and power do we hold? Are some stories overshadowing others? Whose stories, and why? How can the gaps be filled?

Speltz further adds another layer to this discussion by analyzing the agency and agenda of civil rights photographers, reminding us that all record creators have a bias. He chronicles the increasing authority of these photographers, charting their progression from documentarians to active and informed change-makers that used their “images of freedom” to reach supporters and sway opposition. In particular, Speltz goes into great detail describing the strategies behind Malcolm X's and the Black Panther Party's use of photography to establish a

public image, in turn representing themselves as intellectuals, provocative militants, and community activists (“from guns to bread”) (p. 88). This example reminds us that when describing and contextualizing records, especially photographic ones, it is imperative to consider the motivations of the creators: How are the images being used? For what purposes and by whom? Are they staged or spontaneous? How do we interpret or describe this? Do we need to?

Another strength of Speltz’s book is his conversational and accessible writing style. A senior historian at American Girl, Speltz used his research on civil rights not only to write *North of Dixie*, but also to develop the backstory for American Girl character Melody Ellison, an African American girl growing up in 1960s Detroit amid the civil rights movement. His deep interest in and layered involvement with the history of civil rights lends itself to a more personal, direct, and humanizing account.

Seen from an archivist’s perspective, Speltz’s decision to use photographs rather than another medium underscores the urgency of his message. The delicate and quickly deteriorating format speaks to the need for greater preservation efforts; it has a shorter window of accessibility relative to other mediums. Simply put, preservation is paramount to access. This point is further emphasized by reading into the images themselves: one can’t help but notice the parallel between the subject of the photos—volatile race relations—and the instability of the photographic medium itself.

While Speltz’s argument is compelling, I was disappointed that he largely omitted photos of struggles in the South. There is an implicit assumption that everyone reading this book knows the iconic images Speltz references. As a “visual narrative,” his book would have benefited from providing more photographic examples, rather than just text to illustrate his thesis.

And, while I found *North of Dixie* useful in its general discussions, archivists should not come to this book expecting to find nuanced writings directly related to the archives profession; Speltz’s discussions will resonate with archivists, but he does not address the more specific preservation and access concerns unique to archives. Rather, to us, the value is in the example, or case study, his book provides. It models what archives aim to do: expose realities and preserve historical memory.

In the epilogue, Speltz brings the conversation to the present day, noting that now photography is much more likely to be digital and thus presents new challenges and opportunities. Just as Speltz closes his book by assessing the present and considering the future use of photography, so too must archivists. As a photo archivist, I am keenly aware of the power of digital images, of their ability to be easily disseminated, altered, and deleted or lost. I am also cognizant of evolving archival standards, strategies, and technology crucial to improving digital curation and preservation practices. And so, following Speltz’s call to

consider the future, I hope that we shift our focus to developing solutions and best practices for these difficult issues.

Analyzing this book as an archivist left me with more questions than answers. And that's fine. It made me more aware and introspective of myself as an archivist as well as the archives profession, and it will undoubtedly stimulate dialogue surrounding diversity and archives going forward. Ultimately, Speltz succeeds in bringing previously unrepresented voices and narratives to the conversation. The question remains: Can we do the same in our archives?

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*National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution*

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<sup>1</sup> *Detroit*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow (Los Angeles, CA: Annapurna Pictures, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Including "Radical Empathy in Archival Practice," Shannon O'Neill, Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Molly Brown, Dinah Handel, Rachel Mattson, Giordana Mecagni, Holly Alicia Smith, and Kelly Wooten (July 28, 2017); "Intersectionality in Identity-Focused Archives," Rosemary K. J. Davis, Itza A. Cabajal, Kirsten Strigel Carter, Stephanie Krauss, Linda J. Long, Elizabeth Novara, Chloe Raub, Nikki Lynn Thomas, Florence M. Turcotte, and Samantha Winn (July 28, 2017); "Immigration Archival Collections: Difference, Transnationality, and Relevance," Volodymyr Chumachenko, Lisa Huntsha, Daniel Necas, and Danielle Scott Taylor (July 28, 2017), among others.

## Appraisal and Acquisition Strategies

Edited by Michael Shallcross and Christopher J. Prom. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2016. 196 pp. Softcover, PDF, and EPUB. Members \$24.99, nonmembers \$34.99. Softcover ISBN 978-0-931828-00-3; PDF ISBN 978-0-931828-11-9; EPUB ISBN 978-0-931828-10-2.

We are well into the digital era with many if not most repositories contending with born-digital materials and hybrid archives. A brief survey of the archival literature shows an abundance of information regarding nearly every aspect of born-digital archivy. So many of the articles, case studies, special issues, toolkits, and white papers elucidate how to process or preserve born-digital materials. But how do we best collect in the digital era? How do we build collection development policies with this new way of recording human activity? How do we appraise digital content with its volume and complexity? What changes do we need to make to our accessioning procedures for born-digital materials? These types of questions are addressed in *Appraisal and Acquisition Strategies*, part of SAA's *Trends in Archives Practice* series. There are, of course, sources for information regarding accessioning and appraisal of born-digital