

societies' values and aspirations. There has been a proliferation of such "memory" studies: on public monuments and historic sites, on war memorials and Holocaust memory, and on various institutions devoted to memory making and memory presentation such as museums, galleries, libraries, and even zoos. Yet until very recently, rarely have archives been included among such institutions. To my knowledge, Sickinger's is, in fact, the first such book-length monograph (I exclude here traditional administrative histories of various archival institutions, which are an entirely different genre) dealing with archives in this way, although there have been in the past few years, under the international impact of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, a growing number of specialist articles.

Perhaps this curious omission by historians indicates that many still cling subconsciously to their traditional belief in the scientific and objective nature of historical inquiry, which by definition requires a neutral and objective archive as its base, and thus one does not (need to?) question or investigate the archive and archive-making processes too closely. That assumption in turn feeds into, and perhaps draws from, the traditional archival myth about the alleged neutrality and objectivity of our own endeavours. These scales of mutual blindness are beginning to fall from both sets of eyes as archivists discover their own historicity in the memory formation processes, and historians discover the archives in an entirely new way as contested sites of memory formation (and forgetting). The implications of this mutual discovery for professional practice for archivists and historians alike are very suggestive, as they are for a refreshed relationship between the two professions, but that is another story for another day.

Reading James Sickinger's fine volume will not help archivists preserve automated office systems, conduct a macro-appraisal, or develop EAD coding, but it will enrich, broaden, and stimulate their minds and professional life. That is why what happened 2,500 years ago matters.

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The Culture of Secrecy. DAVID VINCENT. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 364 p. ISBN 0-19-820307-1.

Secrecy: The American Experience. DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 262 p. ISBN 0-300-07756-4.

These two titles cover the same subject, have the same objective, but take very different tacks and cover different waters to reach the same conclusion.

In *The Culture of Secrecy* and *Secrecy: The American Experience*, British historian David Vincent and former U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, respectively, explore the roots and growth of bureaucratic secrecy. Tracing key events in their national experiences, the two authors outline the mechanisms devised to protect and perpetuate the state secrets of the United Kingdom and the United States. While both acknowledge there are legitimate purposes for secrecy, they are equally convinced that withholding information from the public has often represented an abuse of power inimical to the democratic state. Finally, Vincent and Moynihan believe that we are at a unique moment to apply correctives to obsessive secrecy. Although for different reasons, both see the present as an opportunity to go beyond the rhetoric of transparent government and public accountability.

It is, however, the timeliness of these two works that is their most telling similarity. Increasingly, the subject of secrecy runs like a thread through much of modern life. The communication revolution unleashed by the personal computer has created a heightened sensitivity to privacy and the potential threats to it. While individuals are undertaking more and more commerce online, they are also seeking the means to protect their privacy or personal secrecy. At the same time, modern governments and corporations are fighting images of themselves as voracious hoarders of personal information on their citizens and clients. The recent debacle at Human Resources Development Canada involving data matching did little to lessen this characterization. Factor into this climate of mistrust the common bureaucratic resistance to the release of information on government activities, and the public suspicion only deepens. Of course, many archivists are all too aware of these developments. Those working with public records are familiar with the suspicious researcher who detects malevolence and the direct hand of the state when records are withheld, or the journalists who sensationalize records as “formerly secret” when publicized. It is presumably this climate of secrecy, suspicion, and confusion which has triggered a spate of recent works and initiatives on secrecy, privacy, and freedom of information.

In both the United Kingdom and the United States, lawmakers have begun to take note of the public attitudes to government secrecy and personal privacy. The United Kingdom is readying itself for the implementation of new freedom of information legislation, while Washington is still wrestling with the sweeping implications of Executive Order 12958, which both reduced the length of time prior to declassification and demanded an explicit justification from agencies resisting the release of previously classified records. Senator Moynihan is one politician who has worked actively in this area, particularly during his last term in the United States Senate. As chairman of the Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy, he led a three-year study into the subject between 1994 and 1997. The book under review is, in fact, a direct product of this commission’s work, resembling very closely one

of the appendices of its final report. Indeed, the book has proved an effective vehicle to champion the more detailed findings of the commission.

The thrust of Moynihan's argument is that in the development of the national security apparatus, the United States government allowed a silent but massive regulatory apparatus to emerge. The over-classification and control of information in the foreign, defence, security, and intelligence fields produced a form of constraint on decision makers and inhibited or prevented the public from understanding foreign and defence policy objectives. Moynihan forms this argument through a brief historical essay. He claims secrecy was a concept alien to the U.S. government prior to the First World War, but that the struggle first against saboteurs from the central powers and then against Bolsheviks produced the first measures controlling the availability of information. The persistence of certain pieces of security legislation and the attitudes behind the original Red Scare of 1918–1921 endured long enough to shape similar responses in the Second World War and the early Cold War. By the time the U.S. initiated its containment policy towards the Soviet Union, secrecy and restriction had become the *modus operandi* for much of the Washington bureaucracy. Moynihan leads us from Whittaker Chambers' pumpkin patch¹ to the Bay of Pigs, to the Pentagon Papers, to Iran-Contra, and finally to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In doing so, he highlights the numerous episodes where presidents and members of congress made decisions without all the available information – information judged by intelligence agencies as too sensitive for wider release. He asserts that if the intelligence and security community had been more open to dialogue and criticism, perhaps the United States would have had a more accurate appreciation of the crumbling Soviet bureaucracy and would have avoided many of the costly and unnecessary expenditures of the late Cold War. In short, by controlling the flow of information, the bureaucracy had an inordinate influence on the shape and direction of U.S. foreign policy.

Oddly, the strength of *Secrecy* is also its one weakness. An easy and fluid stylist, Moynihan has produced a very readable narrative, constructing a clear argument along the way. Although the argument itself is compelling and the conclusion powerful, there is a gloss in the argument that filters out too many of the complexities of the past eighty years. The tendency here is to neglect the domestic political turmoil and tension that accompanied most of these events and to imagine that wiser heads would have prevailed if only they had been better informed. Further, by focussing entirely on foreign policy and security concerns, we are left with the impression that the treasury, interior, commerce and other U.S. departments are models of openness. While not

1 In his pumpkin patch, Chambers hid microfilm implicating Alger Hiss as a spy for the Soviet Union.

subject to the same degree of scrutiny as the more glamorous intelligence agencies, these departments have also been subject to the same criticism. Moynihan also does not really touch on the bureaucratic behaviours which rest behind secrecy wherever it is found. Nevertheless, if one is pursuing an explanation for the layer on layer of restrictions in the U.S. intelligence and foreign policy community, then Moynihan's book provides a superb overview.

Fortunately, some of the shortcomings of *Secrecy: The American Experience*, particularly the bureaucratic impulse to secrecy, are addressed in the second title under review, *The Culture of Secrecy*. David Vincent has put together a far more comprehensive work covering the roots and nature of bureaucratic secrecy in the United Kingdom – comprehensive, in that it covers the entire span of modern British government as well as the entire breadth of the bureaucracy and beyond. His approach is that of the cultural historian, examining groups and their attitudes and situating them in a changing environment. In this case, the principal object of study is the British civil service, beginning in the 1840s with the birth of the modern bureaucracy in the wake of the first *Reform Act*. The concurrent growth in the activities of the state and the demise of appointment by nepotism led to an expansion and professionalization of the civil service. For Vincent, this moment is extremely significant. He explores at length the irony that with the birth of modern accountable government came secrecy, describing it as a “quintessential” element of the state. As numerous commentators have described, power and authority comes from the control of information. Vincent does, however, go well beyond this platitude.

The value here is in the ability of the author to draw into his study all of established British society, going well beyond Whitehall. He details extensively the development of codes of confidentiality and secrecy in medicine, banking, business, labour, and journalism, as well as the unwritten rules of the household and relations with servants. Vincent makes it clear that secrecy and privacy were widely viewed as means of defining economic place and that class was an inescapable part of the equation. In doing so, he draws on a staggering array of primary and secondary sources. While the bureaucracy is the centrepiece of his study, he comes back again and again to these different sectors, providing a cultural setting for the behaviours and abuses of the state.

In this impressive study, not even the subject of archives goes untouched. Vincent briefly describes how the growth of the state caused London to recognize the need for a different concept of archives and records. In the 1840s, a series of decisions widened the scope of the *Public Records Office Act* to encompass “all categories of paperwork generated by government departments” rather than just public legal documents. As he notes, the impact of this was not salutary: “... as the notion of record expanded, that of public contracted. The term [public record] ceased to relate to material which was about and belonged to the population at large, and instead came to describe

documents created and owned by the state.” It would take over a hundred years before any right of access to these records was enshrined in law.

Perhaps the most unusual thing about this book is its positive closing commentary. Vincent takes over 300 pages to document the dynamic between honour and trust, and the role of class in maintaining a hermetic secrecy inside and outside government. However, just before the book went to press, he added an afterword with his comments on the freedom of information initiative introduced by the Blair government. In this section, Vincent demonstrates considerable optimism towards this bill, seeing it as an opportunity to put Britain ahead of many of its continental neighbours. (The bill was subsequently passed on 30 November 2000, but issues of implementation remain.) In taking this position, he believes that a number of circumstances, especially a more pluralistic and open British society, can wipe away the well-ingrained culture of secrecy he has so thoroughly portrayed. Given the U.S. experience that Moynihan describes – much of which occurred after freedom of information – such hope may be premature. However, Moynihan too sees the present as an opportunity. With the disappearance of the half-century-long threat to national security, he believes it is time to move beyond pat national security justifications for the withholding of records from the public.

One only hopes that the collective optimism of the two authors is warranted. There is still a great deal of bureaucratic inertia in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as in Canada. While there is the best of intentions for those seeking open and accountable government, it is clear that reform will not come easily. Until officials understand that there is a greater long-term risk to the state in perpetuating secrecy than in releasing information, little will change. In the meantime, both these authors have given us a greater understanding of what is at stake, what is at risk.

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The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: The McCord, 1921–1996. BRIAN YOUNG. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000. 224 p. ISBN 0-7735-2050-X.

In January 1996, the McCord Museum fired archivist Pamela Miller after twenty-six years of service and issued a press release stating that the archives would immediately be closed to new users and that the archival holdings would be broken up or returned to McGill University. This book is a strangely readable and at times compelling account of the events that led to this development and the abrupt transformation of a university museum and