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Archiving Caribbean Identity: Records, Community, and Memory.

John A. Aarons, Jeannette A. Bastian, and Stanley H. Griffin, eds.
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Archiving Caribbean Identity: Records, Community, and Memory, edited by John A. Aarons, Jeannette A. Bastian, and Stanley H. Griffin, can be considered a follow-up to their groundbreaking *Decolonizing the Caribbean Record*, published in 2018. *Archiving Caribbean Identity* continues the goal of decolonizing the Caribbean record but shifts focus toward amplifying the “dynamic cultural life and lived experience of the region” (p. 1). Aarons, Bastian, and Griffin have brought together 15 chapters all oriented toward the question of who is included in the Caribbean record and what formats these records take on. These essays originated as presentations at the University of the West Indies Department of Library and Information Studies’ first-ever symposium on archives and records in 2019.

As the Caribbean is a large region with many different histories of colonization, it is important to note that this book centres mostly on anglophone Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados. This area of the Caribbean is a unique space made up of many different cultural identities that have influenced each other and melded together over time, and as a result of this sharing, memory forms and practices specific to the Caribbean have emerged. As Aarons, Bastian, and Griffin write in their introduction, “Caribbean records can be described as diverse, dynamic, and delicate” (p. 3), and this book’s contents certainly showcase the truth of this statement. As the archival field still struggles to detach itself from literature and theory that centres primarily North American, European, and Australian ways of archival thinking, this book is a refreshing entrance into considering how other regions conceptualize recordkeeping.

Due to the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and indentureship in the Caribbean, official records cannot often act as sources for memories of the lives of the colonized, and “reliance cannot be entirely placed on the record forms produced and archived in the countries of the colonizers” (p. 2). This book, then, highlights different modes of memory keeping and documentation through the lens of Caribbean culture and experience. The book is divided into two parts. The first part, titled “Tangible and Intangible Formats,” explores different archival forms beyond traditional textual paper records. The second, “Collections Through a Caribbean Lens,” examines existing collections both in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The essays take the reader through a breadth of different countries and their cultural histories, and there is sure to be something for every archivist’s interests. As a Caribbean-American with roots in Guyana, Trinidad, and Suriname, I found each of these chapters to be truly engaging, helping to expand my knowledge beyond the North America-centric focus that is so prevalent in Canadian archival programs.

Chapters range from Stephen Butters’s analysis of landscape as record, focusing on an Antiguan cricket ground, to Desaray Pivott-Nolan’s writing on postage stamps as memory from Trinidad and Tobago. Of particular note in part one of this book is Kai Barratt’s analysis of the song “Savannah Grass” by Kes the Band as an archive of carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. The savannah is an important physical space for Trinidad and Tobago’s carnival, and songs like “Savannah Grass” serve as a form of crowd-sourced collective memory. Soca songs, especially, “chronicle carnival as an experience of liberation and celebration, simultaneously highlighting social nuances” (p. 20). Barratt also writes about the use of nostalgia, another form of memory, in “Savannah Grass” through both the song’s subject matter and its connection to calypso sounds. The genre of soca also has roots in beats and structures connected to “African rituals that have been denigrated instead of being celebrated because of a brutal European legacy” (p. 26).

We go from soca and nostalgia to the next chapter, where Norman Malcolm examines Jamaican Twitter, looking at the role of the virtual network in “documenting and challenging the politics and identity of the community” (p. 33). He ties this case study to Foucault’s concept of counter-memory, or the “resistance of a person towards the official versions of historical continuities” (p. 31). The chapter asks how Jamaican Twitter as an archive might serve as counter-memory and contain evidential and informational value for Jamaican society. Another

notable chapter is the last chapter of part one, which is about aerial photography and satellite imagery as archival tools and focuses on Carlisle Bay in Jamaica. While perhaps a more technical and method-driven chapter, with background on geographical information systems and preservation and formats of aerial photography, this piece is an excellent example of the true breadth of topics that can fall under archival purview, not just in the Caribbean but around the world.

We enter part two of the book, “Collections Through a Caribbean Lens,” with a notable chapter by Tonia Sutherland, Linda Sturtz, and Paulette Kerr on finding evidence of revolutionary resistance in pre-emancipation Caribbean archives. They focus on three Black enslaved women from Jamaica and Guadeloupe and their roles in resistance movements, highlighting their underexplored contributions. They compare Maroon oral histories to “official” archival documentation written by colonizers and write that “Western historiography has, on the whole, underestimated enslaved women’s roles in organizing resistance” (p. 145). Their centring of Black enslaved Caribbean women’s histories through close readings of documents like colonial court proceedings shows us how we as archivists might tease out narratives from within archival gaps. Other interesting chapters in part two include Janelle Duke’s essay on Anglican Church records in Trinidad and Tobago and James Robertson’s history of archival administration in Jamaica with a focus on missing telegrams from the colonial period.

Archiving Caribbean Identity orients our archival discussions to gaps in the current field – those of Caribbean archives and those considering archival materials beyond textual documents. While there are many interesting topics packed into this book, this is not necessarily a comprehensive look at all archiving efforts and concepts in the Caribbean. However, given its size, it should not be considered as such. Instead, it should be seen more as a snapshot of Caribbean archival work that will hopefully create further openings and opportunities, spurring Caribbean archives and archivists to write on the work they are doing and encouraging the archival field to consider other ways of archival knowing that centres Caribbean voices and ideas. Aarons, Bastian, and Griffin provide us with a call to action in their introduction, writing that “If the starting point for archiving Caribbean identity and memory is validating its content and enduring values, the next step is to ensure that deliberate efforts are taken to create enabling environments for their long-term practice and protection” (p. 6). This book does indeed serve as an excellent starting point and a place for the archival field to heed this call and take these next steps.