



Community Archives and the Community Trauma Process

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Experiences that Contributed to this Presentation

- My work at the Music of Asian America Research Center
- My participation in the The Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander in Library and Information Science project (<https://aanhpilis.wordpress.com>)
- Creating a seminar on Community Archives for the University of Maryland MLIS program

The Problem

- Much of the community archives literature assume that these organizations are primarily about collecting, organizing, preserving and sharing materials.
- Therefore, many articles focus on appraisal, processing, preservation and sustainability.

What is an Archive?

It's a place where material related to the history of the institution is:

- Collected
- Organized
- Preserved
- Shared

Screenshot from "What is an Archive?" Video by the Davenport University Archives.

But That's Not a Great Assumption...

- There is a wide variety of community archives.
- For many, the primary goals are not collecting, organizing, preserving and sharing.

My Broad Argument

To understand what community archives really are, we need to apply theories from several other disciplines.

Cultural Trauma Theory and Community Archives

- Cultural trauma theory can help us understand many community archives better. It was developed by Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman and other sociologists.

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CULTURAL TRAUMA

AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Definition of Cultural Trauma

“Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (p. 1).

- Does not arise spontaneously
- Often arises generations after the horrendous event
- The goal of cultural trauma process is to re-narrativize the horrendous event and to sustain the new interpretation.

Japanese American Incarceration Cultural Trauma Process Timeline

- 1942-46: Japanese American Incarceration
- 1968-69: Start of Asian American Movement—one of these goals is to re-interpret the Japanese American Incarceration
- Late 1970s-1988: Redress and Reparations Movement in full swing
- 1988: Civil Liberties Act signed into law
- 1990: First reparations checks released

Japanese American National Library

- Founded 1969
- Founders wanted to establish a place “in which all Japanese American materials would be housed under one roof.”



National Japanese American Historical Society

- Founded 1980
- Redress and Reparations Movement
- Original focus on Japanese American veterans



Japanese American National Museum



- Incorporated 1985, opened in 1992 (post-Civil Liberties Act)
- Disseminates the new official narrative
- Is it time to drop the “community archive” label?