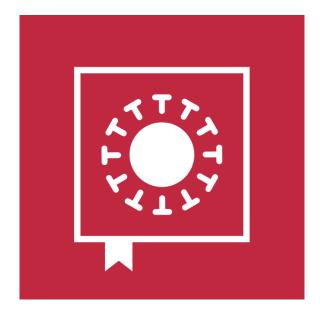# Teaching the Archives Module Four

A Journal of a Plague Year: An Archive of Covid-19

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Module 4: Archival Silences

• **Essential Questions:** Whose voices are absent from traditional and digital archives? How does an archive's collecting policy influence what is understood to be the historical record?

• **Readings:**

1. Gail Drakes, "Who Owns Your Archive?" *Doing Recent History,* ed. Claire Potter and Renee Romano, (University of Georgia Press, 2012): 83-111
2. Watch on YouTube: Dominique Luster, "Archives Have the Power to Boost Marginalized Voices." *TEDxPittsburgh (2018).* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsNPlBBi1IE
3. Bergis Jules, "Confronting Our Failure of Care Around the Legacies of Marginalized People in the Archives." *Medium* (November 11, 2016). https://medium.com/on-archivy/confronting-our-failure-of-care-around-the-legacies-of-marginalized-people-in-the-archives-dc4180397280
4. Podcast: *Archives in Context – Season 1, Episode 3 - Michelle Caswell* (January 28, 2019)*. Listen to excerpts at 00:00 – 02:40 and 37:49 – 42:21.*
5. Choose one or read both:
    a. Carter, Rodney G.S. "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence." *Archivaria* 61 (September 2006), 215-33. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12541.
    b. Wesley C. Hogan, "Who's the Expert? An Essay on Evidence and Authority," in *On the Freedom Side: How Five Decades of Youth Activists Have Remixed American History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019): 213-224.
6. Read or watch:
    a. Watch on Vimeo: Michael Ashley, "Local Contexts Traditional Knowledge Labels." *Local Contexts,* (2013). https://vimeo.com/75449158
    b. J. Kirby, "An Introduction to Traditional Knowledge Labels and Licenses." *Commons Knowledge* (University of Illinois, 2017). https://publish.illinois.edu/commonsknowledge/2017/09/07/an-introduction-to-traditional-knowledge-labels-and-licenses/
7. *Add course-relevant reading here:*

• **Discussion Questions:**

- What factors contribute to archival silences, and what can be done to mitigate these silences? By archivists? By members of marginalized communities? By systems like Traditional Knowledge Labels?
- What is the *legacy of symbolic annihilation* in the archives? How can we piece together records of individuals who have been denied the existence of their lives and/or deaths? What are other ways – besides outright omission – in which voices are silenced in the archives?
- Bergis Jules talks about how archives dictate "who is remembered and how they're remembered," and that "how [people are remembered] dictates who gets violence perpetrated against them." What are some examples of this? How do these examples contribute to our understanding of how archives have been and could be used?
- Who are the stakeholders in the COVID-19 Digital Archive? What are the goals of the different stakeholders, and what might happen when their goals are not in alignment?
- Where are there silences in the COVID-19 Digital Archive? What are the relationships between the stakeholders of this archive and its silences?

• **Activities:**

1. Metadata as active interpretation: During the COVID-19 pandemic, protests erupted across the U.S. and around the world in response to the death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man who was killed by police officers while in police custody. What records of these protests are available in the COVID-19 Digital Archive?

   a. Choose 3 items connected to the Black Lives Matter, George Floyd murder, and anti-police brutality movements from the COVID-19 Digital Archive. How does the *metadata* (information given about the item) contextualize these items? What biases and blind-spots do you notice?

   b. How would you change this metadata to offer a different, or a more complete, historical interpretation? What should future historians keep in mind when they use the COVID-19 Digital Archive 50 years from now, so that they are able to achieve a deep and broad comprehension of these protest events during the COVID-19 pandemic? Use the *Metadata Analysis Template* to capture your thoughts about the existing metadata for the three items you have chosen, and to write new metadata for each item.

   c. Share your item choices and analysis with your partner(s), discuss the process of analyzing and rewriting metadata, and complete the template with a synthesis of what you and your partner(s) found in your work.

2. Work with your partner(s) to create a Mini Collecting Plan for the COVID-19 Digital Archive that would remedy ONE silence you've noticed in this archive. It may be helpful to read through some existing collecting plans/policies; try googling your university's archives (here is the link to the collecting policy from Duke University's archives: https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/uarchives/about/collecting-policy) to find examples. Your collecting plan should include:

   a. A brief description of the kinds of items that are already in the COVID-19 Digital Archive

   b. A description of the silence in this archive

   c. A description of the types of items that should be collected to fill the silence in the archive

   d. A description of the scope of your collecting plan (how many kinds of items will you be looking to collect?)

   e. An action plan that describes how the collecting you do will help to fill the silence (how will you go about collecting these items? whose voices will you need to access? how do you plan to make these connections?)

• **Pairs Well With:**

- Module 1: Archives 101
- Module 2: Digital Archives
- Module 6: Oral Histories

Metadata Analysis Template

COVID-19 Digital Archive Item	Original Metadata:	Biases and blind-spots in the Metadata:	Your REWRITTEN Metadata:
Item 1 Title: Description: URL:			
Item 2 Title: Description: URL:			
Item 3 Title: Description: URL:			
Summary of your analysis and rewriting process:			
Synthesis of your discussion with your partner(s):			

• Feedback:

We want to hear from you and your students about how using this module went! Please let us know what worked and what didn't by taking a few minutes to fill out this [survey](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qP3F3zqYq1c3b3EG-1V89qpV6bk4a0MZTOP02cIDTaQ/edit?usp=sharing) (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qP3F3zqYq1c3b3EG-1V89qpV6bk4a0MZTOP02cIDTaQ/edit?usp=sharing). Thank you!