

Joan Kjaer: Hello, I'm Joan Kjaer, and this is WorldCanvass, from International Programs at the University of Iowa. Happy to have you with us here this afternoon at Merge for what I think will be a terrific discussion.

Our program tonight will be previewing the 2018 Provost's Global Forum, the premier annual event on campus, focused on international and global issues. A joint project of International Programs and the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies ... This year's forum is titled "Against Amnesia: Archives, Evidence and Social Justice." And the public is welcome to attend the varied events connected with this symposium, the bulk of which will be happening March 1st through the 3rd. For more information, you can go to archivesagainstamnesia.com. And in just a moment we'll have a chance to hear more about what will be happening during the full symposium.

So, our topic tonight is Against Amnesia--against forgetting--and the role archives play in telling our stories, recording who we are and what we live through at any point in history. As you'll see, this topic will take us in lots of different directions, so I'd like to introduce my guests for this first segment. Teresa Mangum is just next to me and she's the director of the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, also a professor in the UI department of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies. Thank you for being here, Teresa.

Teresa Mangum: Oh, thank you.

Joan Kjaer: Next to her is Karen Mason, head of the Iowa Women's Archives, located here at the University of Iowa. So, thanks Karen for coming.

And at the far end we have Miriam Thaggert, from the UI Department of English and the UI Department of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies. Thank you, Miriam, for being here.

Very grateful to have all of you here with us here in the audience. I want to go first to Teresa and ask her to tell us what inspired this topic, and why you decided to bring so many different activities and events together under this topic Against Amnesia.

Teresa Mangum: Well, as I suspect we'll hear today, and we'll certainly hear next weekend ... One of the treasures at the University of Iowa, that is too often unknown, is, I guess, are our archives. And people think of archives as papers lining a shelf and certainly many archives are letters, manuscripts, collections of focused books on a subject ... But, if you think about what we have here on campus, you know, that we have the National History Museum, as some of you have seen, there are drawers and drawers of birds, of certain ... Limbs, that are specimens scientists have studied, sometimes for more than a century, to really understand the biological diversity and changes in species populations over time.

We have a medical instruments collection, over in the hospital. We have antique music instruments that people occasionally pull out and play, and it's kind of shocking to realize what the same symphony sounds like, or quartet, that you've heard, what it would've sounded like 200 years ago. Also, and my own personal favorite, we have one of the largest collections of dog novels in the country, thanks to a staff member who collected them here for many, many years. So, I've long wanted to help feature the collections that we have, so that those of us who are teaching in the archive, we know about these ... Ironically, people will come from around the world to use our collections, because they know about them. But I want everybody in Iowa City to know about them too.

Joan Kjaer: And how do you use archives for your own personal research? What is the material you go after?

Teresa Mangum: So what I've used the most are 19th century magazines. And we have a very large collection of magazines, and we have a tendency to think that now that they've been digitized, we're home free. But, when you digitize anything, any book, what tends to happen is advertisements get stripped out, the covers of the book get stripped out, pages with little hand-written notes that tell you so much about who used those materials ... They get stripped out. So that when we let go of the physical artifact, even though it's fabulous to have the digitized versions, it makes the magazines more inaccessible ...

But when I send my students into the stacks and they can actually turn pages, and realize they're handling a book, or magazine a person read 150 years ago, it completely changes their relationship to what they're reading. They're also often humbled because they realize that ... Whereas they have this narrative of progress, that things are getting better and better ... People didn't use to use the word awesome to describe everything from a martini, to, you know, school. And, so they really begin to see what a rich culture existed 100 years ago, 200 years ago, and feel much more inspired, I think, by their history, to start shaping their future.

Joan Kjaer: Just a larger question about these physical materials ... Now that so much can be digitized, is there a danger that the physical materials will just be discarded?

Teresa Mangum: I have a very powerful memory of one of our faculty members, Jeff Cox, basically throwing himself in front of a truck at one point, to preserve the London Times, which was about to be thrown away. So, yes, it does. And actually, this is leaping ahead a bit, but a scholar named Andrew Stauffer will be here in April, who has a great project called Book Traces. And he, when he realized that Google, when they were coming in and digitizing books, at his university, University of Virginia, they then tended for all but a very small group of books ... They would just ditch the books once they're digitized. So he and his students started going in the stacks at University of Virginia and just poring through pages and finding things like, you may have seen in the news recently,

they found George Washington's hair, tucked inside, you know, a novel, or some kind of a book.

And so Andy is gonna come here and we're gonna have, in addition to his talk, a Book Traces event ... Where we're gonna go into the library and students and you all can come, and just go through books in our own library to find those books that have the marginal notes, the special little tucked-in dried flowers, the amazing things that you find in a physical book, that you lose if you rely solely on digitized material.

Joan Kjaer: Well, for people who may not know very much about the Obermann Center, and I'd like to just ask you to talk about it for a moment ... And your own personal, what do I say...passion, I guess, to be part of the public humanities ... To create events that go outside of the campus confines, and share important discussions with a much larger public. Tell us about the Obermann Center and what you do there.

Teresa Mangum: Well, you know, I appreciate your asking that question. So, the Obermann Center is across from the President's House, around the bend where Clinton turns into Church Street. And it is, it's a center that, our mission is to support the research, especially of faculty on campus, but also of graduate students, of visiting scholars ... And so, we have a number of programs that are designed to support individuals when they're doing ... When they step away from their teaching and service for a semester, to work on a lengthy project. But most of our funding actually goes toward encouraging people to try creative, new forms of collaboration.

So, there'll be a call coming out soon for Obermann working groups. A faculty member can apply to lead a group on a topic that any six people are interested in ... And those groups, some of them include community partners and students as well as faculty members. We have other projects during the summer where sometimes we'll have a scientist collaborate with a historian, or an anthropologist. So we really want to do everything we can to support the research mission of the university, but to your point about the public side of things, we also want to encourage our faculty and graduate students to learn how to share their work, and talk about their work, in ways that will make their work very accessible to the public.

So, some of you may have been to our Obermann conversations that we often have in the public library, where we put a community expert and a faculty expert together to talk about a project. As part of the archives conference, as you'll see in your chairs, those of you who are here live ... We'll have next Saturday, before ... This Saturday, before the conference, the following week, an archives crawl that our wonderful associate director, Jennifer New, and people in libraries and museums around town have helped organize, so that anybody and everybody is welcome this Saturday between 11 and 3. To start at the public library, the university library, the State Historical Society, or the Natural

History Museum. And we'll have talks, we'll have student-led tours, to show you what we've got, right here in the community. Again, because we want this to be an event that's a real celebration for everyone here in town, as well as scholars.

Joan Kjaer: Well, before I move on down to Karen and Miriam ... Can you give us a little bit of a picture of what's happening during the symposium itself March 1st through the 3rd?

Teresa Mangum: The symposium, I really encourage you ... Again, if you just go to the Obermann Center website or to the International Programs website, you'll find a link to take you through to the conference schedule. But we have some amazing people coming to Iowa City. And the symposium is gonna focus specifically on particular archives that have been crucial to social justice movements.

So that we will have one of the curators who helped to gather the collection for the National African American History and Culture Museum in D.C. for over a seven year period. Thanks to Miriam for inviting him. We'll have one of our own alums from history who was the national archivist for the United States, and then decided she wanted to move on, create her own consulting service to focus specifically on social justice situations. So she has worked with countries who are using archives to negotiate truth commissions. She has worked with countries where death squad records are hidden that she's helping to bring to light.

We'll also have a librarian and a person from a tribe in Canada, who will be here together to talk about how do you sensitively digitize and protect archives of First Nations folks in Canada? We'll have a historian of science, who suddenly was interested in environmental issues and suddenly found herself with a whole group of scholars around the world, grabbing climate data as fast as they could, when the current federal administration started to take that material down, unexpectedly, a year ago. So these are just amazing, amazing people with fascinating stories to tell.

Joan Kjaer: And all these events are free? All are open to the public?

Teresa Mangum: Yes. All free. They're mostly here and in the public library, and we'd love to see you all there.

Joan Kjaer: Well, thank you. And, Karen, let me go down to you now. You head up the Iowa Women's Archives, and I think you just have hit a 25th anniversary, if I'm not mistaken.

Karen Mason: Yes, we've been celebrating our 25th anniversary-

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Karen Mason: This past year we're-

Joan Kjaer: Well, congratulations. Yeah.

Karen Mason: Continuing that, yeah.

Joan Kjaer: So tell us about the Women's Archive.

Karen Mason: Well, the Iowa Women's Archives was founded in 1992 by two Des Moines women, prominent women ... They were feminists, both of them, one a Republican, one a Democrat. Louis Noun was the one who had the idea for the archives, and she got that idea in the 1960s when she was doing research for her history of the women's suffrage movement in Iowa. And she had earned a degree in history at Grinnell College, but was not a practicing historian except she really loved it ... And so, her mother had been a suffragist, so that's how she got interested ... And she scoured the archives and libraries and historical societies in Iowa, and couldn't find much on Iowa suffragists, even though, as many of us know, Carrie Chapman Catt and Amelia Bloomer, both lived in Iowa.

So she had to go to the Radcliffe College Schlesinger Library and the history of women in America. And there she found a lot of material about Iowa suffragists. But, after she got home, she thought to herself ... We need a women's archives in Iowa. But that was in the sixties. She published her book in 1969, called Strong-Minded Women, and she got involved in a lot of other things ... She was president of the Iowa Civil Liberties Union and on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union. So it wasn't until 1990 that she got back to this idea, and then she invited Mary Louise Smith to join her. Which I think was a really brilliant act of bipartisanship.

And they together approached the University of Iowa ... And, one interesting and important fact, is that, you know, Hunter Rawlings, the president at the time said, "Great idea; how you gonna pay for it?" And she said ... she told me later that when she went home...she was sitting in her apartment on Fleur Drive, which looked like a gallery because she was an art collector who focused her collecting on works by women. And she said, "I have an endowment hanging on the wall."

Joan Kjaer: Wow.

Karen Mason: And she offered to sell her painting by Frida Kahlo, Self Portrait with Loose Hair. And that sold in 1991 at Christie's for over one and a half million dollars, and created an endowment for the archives. And so that's why we exist. Those three women: Louise, Mary Louise, and Frida.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. And so you not only do your own research to find stories that should be collected, but you sent out, sort of, a public request to people to help you on various projects?

Karen Mason:

Yes, well. People wonder how we find material for the archives, and in the early years, it was a lot of just going out around the state and giving talks at public libraries, or meeting people who had been suggested to us. There was a lot of publicity when we started, because of the Frida Kahlo sale. It was a great way to get the word out there across the nation, in fact. And so some collections just started coming in.

And I had worked in archives for a long time, but I hadn't done collection development. And I realized that really archives just don't happen ... That we have to go looking for things, and especially if we didn't just want to acquire the material of well-educated white women. Which is what will come to us naturally in a state like Iowa, especially. But, in any other place ... So, we ... Louise Noun, in fact, had said when the archives was established she wanted us to be sure to gather the histories of African American women in Iowa.

And so, very soon after, within the first couple of years, we started seeking funding to hire an archivist to gather African American women's history. And Kathryn Neal was hired and was here for three and a half years in the nineties. And we were able to acquire a wonderful set of collections that have been very well used. You might see there's a wonderful exhibit on our website on African American women students at the University of Iowa. And if any of you've been to the main library this month and seen the Invisible Hawkeyes exhibit, right in front, there's a picture of the five women who integrated Currier Hall in 1946. One of them is Virginia Harper, and I might talk about her in a minute. Whose papers we have.

Another one is Dora Martin Berry, the first Miss SUI. There was a lot of publicity the last year or so, because President Harreld apologized to her for the fact that when she was nominated and won Miss State University of Iowa in 1955, the university did not recognize it, it was students who voted on it. We happened to have won the Rose Bowl that year, but she was not allowed to represent the university at it, and she was not officially recognized by the university. So, it was a very sad incident in our history, but we had a graduate student, as part of our African American project, who interviewed her about that whole experience in the 1990s. So, we have some very rich collections on African American women's history because of that.

Joan Kjaer:

Yeah, you sent a few notes to me before the program and I thought this was ... It relates to what you just said, but I thought this was so important ... Through history, archives attended to record the lives of the powerful, effectively silencing the stories of everyone else. And so your mission really here is to find a lot of those other stories that don't really seem that important to the larger history. Until some time goes by, maybe, and then they do help to create that fuller picture of what life was like.

Karen Mason: Right, right. And I think starting with the Women's Archives ... I mean, we're starting with a group, half the population that was left out of archives for most of history.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Karen Mason: But we've also then expanded that ... So we've tried to gather the stories and the letters, and diaries and scrapbooks, and photographs, and other material of the broad spectrum of Iowa women, whether those are farmers, or mothers, housewives, club women. But also women who have taken a very active role in politics or social movements, and so ... Because of our, I feel like, coming from the point of view of documenting women, we are more inclined to document, to notice, that other groups are missing from our histories. Such as African Americans, and rural women, Latinas, Jewish women.

Joan Kjaer: You said you might talk a little more about Virginia Harper.

Karen Mason: Yes. That's just a fabulous collection in Iowa Women's Archives. And actually, Virginia Harper was some ... In looking through files I realized I met her within the first month I was on the job. I went with the director of the library to visit her in Fort Madison. She was one of the women who integrated Currier Hall in 1946 and then she became a medical technician and worked in her father's medical office in Fort Madison. He was a doctor.

And, she ... He was very active in the NAACP, and she became very active in the NAACP so when he was president she was a secretary and she used to type up these newsletters and they're just very modest-looking documents ... Seeing these things where the ... She typed a whole line across, because you didn't have desktop publishing, you couldn't make columns. It's just very modest, but the newsletters from the sixties, talked about civil rights issues, nationally and locally. She promoted a boycott of businesses that would not consider or hire minorities, African Americans or Mexican Americans. And so, there's grassroots activism right there in front of you. And, you mentioned digitized materials. We have digitized those newsletters so people can go online and see those anywhere.

Joan Kjaer: Great.

Karen Mason: She was also very involved in, with, a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Transportation to stop Highway 61 from being rerouted right through the middle of the black and Mexican American communities, as happen in so many cities. They just tore apart these neighborhoods. But she, working with the NAACP and the local community, really protested that, was able to stop it. It took many years, almost ten years, but they stopped it. And it does not go ... They built a bypass instead.

And then, just one other thing ... In that collection, there's just the most exciting document, one of our favorites in the archives. Which is, Virginia Harper's great aunt wrote down the Dandridge family history. Which, if you saw a line in a finding it, you would think ... Eh! One of genealogies, real cool, but whatever. You know, maybe not so exciting. But, in fact, it is this handwritten document on notebook paper that, in which, Rosa Dandridge Prior wrote down the stories her parents told her about their lives as slaves in Tennessee and Kentucky. They came here right after emancipation in the 1860s and settled in Lee County Iowa. So, it's a remarkable document.

Joan Kjaer: Oh. Thank you so much for introducing us to that. And, Miriam, I'd love to go to you now. The work you do utilizes archives and your research into lives of African Americans in this century and perhaps before, is something we'd like to hear about tonight.

Miriam Thaggert: Well, thank you for inviting me. Well, I'm working on a book right now that studies African American women and the American railroad. And usually when you mention the American railroad people have images of, you know, the train, engineers, conductors, perhaps the Pullman porters. But, my work will examine African American women as workers and as passengers on the American train.

And, my work with archives deals a lot with the Newberry Library in Chicago. The Newberry holds the Pullman Archives from the Pullman Company. And, a couple of years ago I've been looking at the archives dealing with women who worked as Pullman maids. Everyone's familiar with the Pullman porter, the African American men who would shine shoes for tips, work on the railroad, in order to support their families. Not too many people know about the Pullman maids. And so, my work deals with trying to track their experiences working for the Pullman Company.

Joan Kjaer: What kinds of records are available?

Miriam Thaggert: Well, the records are somewhat scattered in the larger Pullman Archives. But, I've managed to find applications that the women have filled out, in order to work as Pullman maids. One particular item that has been very helpful for me have been the employee cards. So the Pullman Company would have employee cards for nearly everyone who worked on the train. And, on the front they would record biographical information, say, where the person was born, their age, where they presently live. But then on the back, there would be information about infractions, things that the workers did wrong in order to have some sort of record of, you know, bad service. So it's really the records of the infractions that I've found have been quite interesting for me, and helpful in trying to figure out who some of these women were.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. And what do you find ... What would you learn you can't find? What does not seem to exist when you go in, to take that next step toward the investigation?

Miriam Thaggert: Well, you know, there are a number of books dealing with the African American porter. It's been very hard to find information dealing with the women who worked for the company. I've encountered one interview with a woman who worked as a Pullman maid, but that interview was recorded primarily because she was a local politician in California and her experiences as a Pullman maid came up sort of incidentally to a larger discussion about her work as a politician. So, finding information about these women has been very difficult. You have to look in unexpected places, but I find that's the more exciting thing to do, as an academic, and as a researcher ... Trying to find information in the little nooks and crannies of an archive.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah, yeah. Wow. Well, thank you so much for telling us about that. And this is all very exciting and clearly, you know, I've lived here all of my life, and a lot of these archives I'm very unfamiliar with ... So, I'm really happy to hear about it all tonight.

And I thank you Miriam Thaggert, and Karen Mason, and Teresa Mangum for getting us started on this first segment. And I want to say thank you to all of you for being with us for this first segment of our program. WorldCanvass programs are all available as audio podcasts on iTunes, Public Radio Exchange, and the International Programs website. For International Programs, I'm Joan Kjaer, and thanks for being here.