



**CRITICAL
RACE
CONVERSATIONS**

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Research

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Race and the Archive

DESCRIPTION: Dialogue with Urvashi Chakravarty, Brandi K. Adams, Amanda Herbert

Thursday, March 8, 2021

AMANDA HERBERT: Welcome to Critical Race Conversations, a series hosted by the Folger Institute with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon foundation. I'm Amanda Herbert, associate director for fellowships at the Folger Institute. We are delighted to gather so many friends, old and new, for these conversations. I'd like to take a moment to introduce the series and our speakers for today's event. This series of free online sessions features scholars who are offering new insights into the pre-history of modern racialized thinking and racism.

HERBERT: Our speakers are acknowledging deeper and more complex roots to enduring social challenges and conducting more inclusive investigations of our contested pasts, all with the goal of creating a more just and inclusive academy and society. The Folger Institute is providing the framework and platform, but as is our practice, we turn to scholars across disciplines and career stages to lead discussions from their own experience and expertise. We recognize that we should allow others who are more knowledgeable about this field of critical race studies to create the conversations.

HERBERT: In these critical race conversations, we are actively experimenting with new technologies and new ways to foster dialogue and present content, just as people are around the world. For this session, our speakers welcome live tweeting with the #Folger CRC and comments posted in the YouTube live chat. You may also post questions via twitter or the live chat, and we'll relay as many of these as possible in the time that we have. I remind you that this session will be recorded and posted on the Folger's YouTube channel as soon as it is processed, with closed captioning enabled and a verified transcript to be uploaded next week.

HERBERT: Please contact the Folger Institute with any questions or concerns. Today's session on race in the archive is organized by Dr. Urvashi Chakravarty of the University of Toronto, who is joined by Dr. Brandi Adams who will begin a new position at Arizona State University this fall. Our presenters have elected to forgo

long introductions in favor of more time for discussion, but you can learn more about all of their accomplishments by following links in the chat. Welcome all, and we look forward to this conversation.

URVASHI CHAKRAVARTI: Thank you so much for that wonderful welcome and thank you to everyone for coming. It's such a busy time, and we're so grateful to be able to think with you and talk with you. And, Dr. Adams, I'm just really excited to be in conversation with you and to learn from you. And I wanted to begin by thinking a bit about the terms of our conversation today. The title of our session is Race in the Archive, and I thought it might be helpful to start by reflecting on what we actually mean by that term. We use it frequently, but what do you understand by the term, "The Archive?"

BRANDI K. ADAMS: First off, I am super excited to be able to talk with you as well, Professor Chakravarty, and thank you to everybody at the Folger for hosting us. I think today I'm going to begin a bit humorously with something that some of you may have seen on Twitter. So, I'm going to share something on my screen very quickly. Hopefully, you can all see this. And this is from Archive Memes.

ADAMS: And as you can see, there is a sort of befeathered, exciting, spectacular Archive, and there's the sort of, how shall we say, sort of less exciting, maybe more practical archive. And this is something that Professor Chakravarty and I have spent a lot of time sort of thinking about. But I thought this visual sort of captured this humorously and quite beautifully, particularly since the conversations have been happening on social media and on other places as well.

ADAMS: So today, what I'm going to do is sort of limit the conversation a little bit. I would like to think about the Archive in the way that literary scholars and cultural critics speak of it and a little bit how archivists and librarians do. But I do want to quickly acknowledge that there are so many other fields that think about how archives get used. They think very broadly and very deeply. But I want for us to sort of stay within our comfort zone, so I think what we'll do is sort of limit it to literary critical and literary historical fields.

ADAMS: And I want to say that archivists and librarians have worked tirelessly to catalogue and describe objects and countless texts, both in manuscript and print, and objects and paintings, in an attempt to organize collections of materials. This work is completed by expert individuals with whom I would not be able to do my work, without whom I believe Professor Chakravarty wouldn't be able to do her work, and we do want to acknowledge these people and their just vast knowledge and expertise.

ADAMS: But, as literary and historical scholars, we have to have greater conversations, as do other people in other fields. But for us, greater conversations about the complications of this work. And for now, I want to say that what we're going to be doing is narrowing the sort of definition to our collective understanding

of the space. And what I mean by that is that the archive is both a particular space and a liminal space that contains real objects and texts, where one hopes to find answers to the gaps in knowledge about literary texts or historical moments, or both, that we encounter in our research.

ADAMS: And whether it's we want to know more about it or we're trying to understand other people's research, there are different motivations for using this space. Something that I found that was really interesting, the first use of the archive in English is in 1603. It's a translation of Plutarch. And it might be the word *tabulai*. That's the closest I could come up with.

ADAMS: So that sort of complicates the term as well because it's both a metaphorical and an actual space and it's one that's always used in translation. So, I think that's really rather exciting as well. And the other thing that I want for us to keep in mind is that for some scholars, work in this liminal and particular space, can be one that is painful when you're sort of looking at the past as it pertains to you as a person of color, or a disabled person, or a queer person.

ADAMS: We want to really be mindful that the space isn't one that is necessarily comfortable at all times. And it's also freeing because it's a space where sometimes your instincts get realized, you feel like there's something that's there, and it's there. Sometimes it can be limiting because the work that you want to do, you don't necessarily find the answers in the archives, but that doesn't mean that they're not there.

ADAMS: But I think that together, hopefully throughout this conversation, Professor Chakravarty and I will just explore how we understand this liminal and particular space.

CHAKRAVARTY: Thank you so much. And as you're talking about the liminal and the particular, and also as you're thinking about that, sort of, early use of the archive, which is really fascinating, I want to ask you a little bit more because I know this is something that you're also thinking about in your own work, whether we can look at texts themselves, whether they're historical or literary, as a type of archive and whether artifactual traces have to be difficult to reach in order to constitute an archive.

ADAMS: No, I don't believe that they need to be. I think that, at times, the work that we are engaging with, whether, in my case if it's early modern drama or it could be early modern historical materials, it could be anything, I think that representational forms that appear in these texts, in my own way I believe can be a part of this larger liminal space that we go to to think about the past.

ADAMS: And I wouldn't be able to do this, of course, without the work of cultural and literary historians, including Saidiya Hartman, Kim F. Hall, Jorn Rusen, Margo Hendricks, Patricia Parker, and countless other scholars who think about physical

objects, people, places... They originally thought about this by, sort of, encountering the texts. I should also bring up Imtiaz Habib, without whom I think a lot of us would not be able to do the kinds of work that we want to do.

ADAMS: Because these are the scholars who looked at the texts and felt like there was something there, and then were able to think about and work with the archive until this material appeared and changed the face of the scholarship that we try to do. I also think that we want to be very careful about the relationship between fiction and history, but at the same time realize that representational forms can be a part of history and can be a part of the archive itself.

ADAMS: And I am such a fan of your work and I am just really excited to be here with you today. And I, kind of, am wondering what you think about how the archive plays a role in our disciplinary and professional lives.

CHAKRAVARTY: Thank you. And likewise, as you know. I find myself thinking a lot about the almost interchangeable way in which we use the term, "The Archive," in everyday discourse. So, we use it to talk about the materials and the texts and the artifacts themselves, but we also use it to talk about the institutional or the structural space of the archive, as the sort of, bricks and mortar that house these documents.

CHAKRAVARTY: And because of the slippage, I think there's tacitly a third sense of the archive as a kind of disciplinary or professional imprimatur. And I'm thinking a bit, also, about the terms of our conversation it's, "Race and the Archive," and I think often there is a way in which race is seen, sort of, mere theory, and the archive is the empirical truth. And so, I, sort of, am excited for the chance to think with you about how to really take those terms apart a little bit.

CHAKRAVARTY: So, there were, sort of, four broad points that I think I'd like to think about in the next few minutes. And the first is the question of who gets to go to the archive and how that works in terms of our discipline. So how is access to the archive assumed or controlled? How does gatekeeping operate? Both in terms of actually going to these spaces and in terms of encountering these materials. So, are you quote end quote a real scholar if you haven't been to XYZ archive or if you haven't been to any archive?

CHAKRAVARTY: How does the physical space in the situation of the archive operate? And by that I'm referring to both the architecture of the archive, but also where it's located. So, in particular, I think about what it means to be a scholar of color. For instance, moving through Capital Hill or San Marino or the Gold Coast of Chicago, just to name three spaces where archives are located that have very particular kind of geographical and historical resonances. There's also the question, of course, of who gets to travel to archives in terms of their financial resources, who's able to afford it.

CHAKRAVARTY: And I think it's important to remember that archives are a place where we go to encounter the texts and documents and artifacts, but we also encounter other people working with them. So, they're spaces where networks are formed and reaffirmed and ratified. So, they are sort of intrinsically professionalizing spaces and that means that they are also subject to all of the other quandaries, or many of the quandaries, that we need to, sort of, think about in relation to professionalizing spaces.

CHAKRAVARTY: And speaking of the financial piece of the puzzle, I've been thinking about the ways in which archival fellowships operate and have changed a little bit, particularly over the past year. So, I'm really heartened by the capacious ways of thinking about fellowships that the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, or the Folger, have modeled for us over the past year. But I think there's a way in which, traditionally, there have been particular kinds of work that perhaps fit more readily than others into the archival fellowship mold.

CHAKRAVARTY: And one of the things I love so much about your brilliant work, Dr. Adams, and the work of scholars like Miles Grier is how it so beautifully clarifies the imbrication of quote end quote traditional forms of book history with early modern race making. And there's another piece to this too which is about digitalization projects, which have made documents and materials much more available.

CHAKRAVARTY: And so, it's democratizing, but I do wonder whether it has to potential to place further pressure on the book or the text or the artifact as itself a kind of object that's presumptively the urtext and one that also takes on a kind of iconic value. And so, this brings me to my third point which is that there's a kind of studies, somewhat staged, neutrality around the term, "The Archive."

CHAKRAVARTY: And that makes me think about the kinds of work and particularly the kinds of affects that are not allowed or enabled by or occasioned in the archive. And I'm thinking here of Kim Hall's work but also work by Hartman, by Christina Sharpe, and others. And so, the question for me sort of becomes whether the archive demands or rewards white affect and particular kinds of white affect.

CHAKRAVARTY: And then the final point I'd like to maybe think about a little bit or unpack is what we go to the archive to do. And often it's to try to discover new things. And this discourse of discovery for me is so complicated partly because the way in which it thinks about, or doesn't think about, who's labor is involved, what kinds of labor are involved. But I also wonder what kind of impulse drives discovery as sort of the teleological aim of working in the archive.

ADAMS: I think that that is a wonderful question and it actually leads me to a question to your question, which is to think about... This has to do with sort of the... It's a seeming colonial impulse to want to discover and as you've mentioned in our other conversations, to plant a flag on an object or a text and claim it as your own, when in fact there are so many other people who are involved.

ADAMS: So, as we think about recovery or uncovering something, or discovering something, or rediscovering something, at the same time I also wonder, during this whole process of looking for material texts or objects, what does the archive cover up? What does it make it difficult for us to know? What does it obfuscate?

CHAKRAVARTY: Thank you. And yes, I've been really grappling with that problem of, you know, the sort of language of discovery that gets mobilized and what it implies, and what kinds of habits of thought, also in terms of disciplinary and professional mechanisms too that it involves. And I do wonder whether this is? a moment to think about cataloguing how we recognize these different kinds of labor that often aren't fittable? or acknowledged when we look at archival materials.

CHAKRAVARTY: But then, as you say, the projective recovery is so important. And I'm particularly thinking here of Imtiaz Habib's work which is so invaluable and foundational, and his insistence on history's that scholars have refused to see or synthesize. And one of the things that I think is so useful about his work is the way in which it approaches what seem to be gaps in the archive. Right? The blanks, what's missing or left off or left out.

CHAKRAVARTY: And so, one really troubling instance of this that I've encountered, for instance in my own work, occurred when terms of servitude are conveniently left blank in indenture contracts, and what kinds of implications that might have. And I've also been trying to think and write about the sort of semantic assonances between blankness, the blanks in the archive, what's missing, between blankness and whiteness and the ways in which whiteness strategically structures blankness.

CHAKRAVARTY: So that the blank of the archive, the missing of the archive, and this is something that Peter Erickson and Kim Hall have really vitally noted, reflects whose lives are worth recording and whose lives are not worth recording. And then that also makes me think of someone like John Blanke himself [LAUGHS], right? The black trumpeter in Henry the VII and Henry the VIII courts. Is Blanke his name? Is it a play on blanco? What does it reveal or obscure about his identity?

CHAKRAVARTY: And what scholars like Saidiya Hartman and Marisa Fuentes have originated and modeled, of course, are critical methodologies. Really crucial critical methodologies of reading the traces in the archive in light of the imperial and the racial violence that placed them there. And so, if we think about Hartman's praxis of critical fabulation, for instance, to try and respond to and exceed the confines of the archive. And what becomes a kind of mandate of verifiability, but that mandate, of course, lends itself to particular aims over others.

CHAKRAVARTY: And as I think about this, I'm reminded also of Christina Sharpe's theorization of the "Ditto ditto," in lists of enslaved peoples, for instance, where the ditto both denotes someone but also precisely obfuscates that person and becomes a kind of placeholder of suspended humanity in the archive. So, I think we're left

with two really big questions which is, “How do we read what isn’t there?” in Kim Hall’s famous formulation, but also, “How do we read what is there?”. And how do we recognize and contextualize that material theoretically as well as historically?

CHAKRAVARTY: And I think if we, sort of, grapple with these questions, one big part of it has to be about the work that preservation and also provenance does in relation to the archive. And I know that this is something you’ve thought about a lot, so I’d love to hear more from you about what you think about the question of destruction in relation to the archive. So, are archives a form of destruction? What traditions have we destroyed? And where do things come from? What is their provenance? How do we think about these kinds of myths of origin as it were?

ADAMS: Yes. So, in my own strange way, I have a very small background in archeology as well as literary and cultural history and literature. And some of the ways I like to think about the archive is not dissimilar from the act of archeology itself, where there are archeologists who acknowledge that by the physical act of digging something up out of the ground and taking it out of a preserved status, or diving into the ocean and pulling material or people out, is a form of destruction.

ADAMS: It may be ecological destruction; it might be historical destruction. How do we think about the material that’s there? If you find an amphora or pottery that’s broken, was it broken was it was placed in the ground? Was it broken as a matter of geological shifts and changes in the space that you’re working in? And what happens once we start exhuming all of these bodies, objects, texts, out of the ground.

ADAMS: And we try to contextualize it in the best ways that we can, but we still have to acknowledge that what we’ve done is destroyed an environment in order to recreate an environment to try to understand that environment. And I think that acknowledging the process that happens while you’re entering into a space that is organized in a particular way, or disorganized in a particular way, depending on what kind of archive you’re going into.

ADAMS: the act of putting your hands into a box full of papers and letters that have not been organized in a particular way, and you maybe have a compulsion to want to organize them, you’re still altering the space, and you’re still altering the texts. And you’re still altering the organization or disorganization that’s there. And I think that this is another way to, sort of, keep focusing on the multiple layers of people, places, things that are involved when we think about the archive itself.

ADAMS: To sort of stretch out my archeology metaphor a little bit more, by way of personal example, when I had the great fortune, when I was a senior in college, to live in Athens, Greece for a summer and go on an archeological dig, and one of the things that we were able to do was to see photos of the dig from the 1930s. I was the college student, and we were doing all of the heavy digging ourselves. We were cheap labor, it was an opportunity for us to learn, and we learned so very much.

ADAMS: But part of... In the 1930s and 1920s when these sites were first being opened, they were using Greek labor. Men who would come in from all over Greece. Sometimes they were in Athens, sometimes they were from the islands, and they would spend hours and hours and hours digging the trenches and understanding the space. Understanding where to stop in case you hit a grave. What to do. And I think we also need to acknowledge those people as a part of this larger project.

ADAMS: And then the other thing I wanted to think about as well is that, as you're digging to the level that you want to get to, we wanted to get to fifth century BC, we were throwing out 13th century Turkish pottery. Just over our shoulders. And for medievalists that's horrible because you're watching a piece of history that you're interested in being sort of thrown to a refuse pile. In the same way, I think that we do this with the archive. We go through stages of history as we're getting to the place and the space that we want to be.

ADAMS: And I also think it's our job to acknowledge the countless people who organized and kept it safe, who built the vaults in which the materials that we get to see and get to experience have existed. And a lot of times this can be low paid laborers who make sure that all of these things happen. And I think that helps us to keep these things in check as we think about all of the layers that get destroyed.

ADAMS: Sometimes cultural memory gets destroyed and we also destroy the expertise of the people who were a part of a process as we're trying to get to the space that we need to get to. And I think that the other thing that you have certainly brought up earlier is that, how do we think about the people who are a part of the physical text that we look at?

ADAMS: So, I can't help but think if I am looking at a book that's made from rags, I think of work like Heidi Craig's excellent, wonderful work on Ragpickers who were women who would go and collect the rags that were then boiled and turned into paper. Are we erasing them? Are we destroying them in our search for this particular archival material? Do we think about the people who were charged with, if they're linen shirts, picking linen?

ADAMS: If it's cotton and we are, sort of, running up on times in which people enslaved people, were picking cotton, whether on the islands or elsewhere. How do we think about that? How do we consider all of this material? How do we deal with the fact that our good fortune sometimes comes at the exploitation of other people? And that can be stultifying when you enter the space itself.

ADAMS: How do you, sort of, handle the fact that you're a part, whether you like it or not, of this colonial discourse of, like, coming in and trying to reorganize this material? Maybe you can say in the end what I'm trying to do is bring to light the disjointed nature of this kind of search, but at the same time it's hard not to

continually thinking about, sort of, the... Oh, my goodness, the hundreds of hands that were a part of the material that you're lucky to study.

CHAKRAVARTY: Thank you. And I love the way in which it's sort of taking us through the layers of history. Of labor, the genealogies that structure our experience of these texts, and the way in which they're so often elided. And I suppose that the question then sort of becomes, how do we reckon with where the money to fund these archives, the money to structure these archives, the money to fund our ability to work in these archives, where does it come from and how do we deal with the implications of that sort of apparatus?

ADAMS: I think that the minute we walk into any library, I don't know if you feel this way, but you do think about who founded the library, what principles it was founded on, the ethics of those principles. Do I simply say, "Oh, this is of a time and a place? Do I sit and meditate for a minute about how these materials ended up in this space?" And I also have to acknowledge whether I like it or not, I'm working in a capitalist framework.

ADAMS: There are going to be people who have to work, whether it's the wonderful security guards who greet you as you're coming into the library, it's the docents, its volunteers, it's the library staff of all sorts, who are, sort of, helping you to be able to do this work. But in order for them to do their work, they also need monetary support, and that's something that, whether we like it or not, we have to acknowledge as well.

ADAMS: And in order to be as ethical as possible, it's important to at least acknowledge it. I think one of the things I will find myself continually talking about during this whole process, and I've been so lucky to, sort of, have some extended conversations with Professor Chakravarty about all of this, and I keep harping on the word, "Acknowledgement."

ADAMS: Like, if there's a place for us to be able to acknowledge every single entity, I know it would take hundreds of pages in order to do that, but at least for ourselves, just to remember, that in order for a book that you call up at whatever library or archive, in order for it to exist and be where it is, it's had a whole life of travel.

ADAMS: People who spend a lot of time studying provenance, I think particularly right now about Claire Bourne and Jason Scott-Warren who are tracing the provenance of a 1623 edition of Shakespeare that likely belonged to Milton, how did it get from Milton and Milton's family in England, to Philadelphia? And there are going to be these questions of, like, was it purchased ethically? How did it get here?

ADAMS: What kind of money was it bought with? Whose been caring for it? What did those people know or what do those people know? I think those are the things that I'm going to continually return to. And I think a lot of scholars do, you want to

know where funding comes from, how funding works. Who gets the funding?
'Cause that's another question.

ADAMS: Do you want to see as many different people able to interact with this material? Because how I look at it is going to be different from how you look at it, from a whole array of scholars. And I think, again, I think I'll keep harping on the word, "Acknowledgement," and to think about how the material you work with came to be with you in that moment, and why this relationship is ultimately important.

ADAMS: Yeah. So, one of the questions that sort of I'm very curious about because we think about all of this material being collected together, how do we do that as ethically as possible? Can we collect without colonizing? Can we do it without decontextualizing? Like I said before, pulling objects from wherever, putting them together into a collection, and trying to make sense of them. Is that possible? Do you think that's possible?

CHAKRAVARTY: So, I'm really struck by that very sort of vivid image that you've drawn for us. That is so important. I think of the networks, these vast networks of labor and how much of it is invisibilized, and the way in which it's almost impossible to acknowledge all of that work and that labor because we don't know since it's been invisibilized. It's been elided.

CHAKRAVARTY: And I think this question of how do we sort of collect without colonizing, without decontextualizing it, I think it really speaks to the responsibility of the archive, what that responsibility is, and to the history of particular archive's relationships to imperialism and to white supremacy. And I keep thinking of Michael Witmore's comment at the opening of the second RaceB4Race symposium in 2019.

CHAKRAVARTY: That the first director of the Folger Library, Joseph Quincy Adams, stated at its opening that it would promote quote/unquote, "Anglo-Saxon Culture," in an age of immigration to sort of stem the tide of immigrants, or an attempt to do that. And for so many archives, that history is literally part of its foundational ethos and its originary logic.

CHAKRAVARTY: So, I think in order to grapple with that history, I know that there are many conversations ongoing that consider the responsibility of any given archive in its physical space, both within and without the building itself. So, the questions that occur to me, and these are questions that we know, but I think it bears repeating, whose bags get checked extra carefully? Who's asked to show their badges repeatedly? Who's followed by security guards, by police even?

CHAKRAVARTY: Who is seen to belong in these spaces? And there's also the role that these archival institutions play in the cultural imagination, whether or not it's intentional or volitional or even desired. And one of the things I'm very struck by is

that I understand that in advance of the Capitol insurrection in January, a letter was prepared to send to the Folger, even though I don't believe it was received in the end, to assure the Folger that they wouldn't be affected by the insurrection.

CHAKRAVARTY: And so, I'm thinking about this kind of originary history of white supremacy sort of tying into this archive as a sort of persistent emblem of white supremacy and what can be done to and what must be done at every step to resist those attempts to coopt these spaces and these materials. But even in localized ways, I think there's a question of who is accorded expertise in the archive?

CHAKRAVARTY: Who is, to borrow that famous term, presumed incompetent in these spaces? And the question of sort of where the money comes from is such a complicated one, as you've been saying already. And it's complicated too not just because of our obligation to acknowledge the conditions that frame our ability to be in these spaces, but because of the way also these genealogies of the financial underpinnings of these institutions actually affect current practices too.

CHAKRAVARTY: So, for instance, I'm thinking of collections which contain plantation records and histories of slavery where you have to request permission to use these collections, in any way, from the family who donated them. Not just to reproduce them, but even to quote them. So, to what extent do these practices, not only structuring, but frankly policing access to these histories, to these knowledges, to these genealogies, and how do they really delimit the range of frameworks and methodologies and questions that we can bring to the archive?

CHAKRAVARTY: So, I think though the broader question that I may be gesturing to you is how we consider the relationship between preservation and reparation. So, preservation is obviously a priority, but I think it's important to consider, as you've been saying, the epistemologies that structure the impulse to collect and to collate and to really acknowledge firstly, and then really unpack these epistemologies as they've molded. Not just specific archives, but the kind of larger specter of the archive over time.

CHAKRAVARTY: And I suppose I'm wondering whether we can think, not only about the narratives and the fictions that the archive allows, what kinds of stories it allows us to tell, what kind of stories it sort of enables, but also whether we can think of the archive itself as a kind of fiction. And what I mean by this is that I think we really need to resist all attempts to mystify the archive as a kind of neutral or stable edifice.

CHAKRAVARTY: And instead, I think we really need to contend with the kinds of strategies of race that have shaped it over time and that continue to inform it to this day. So, the archive, as we know, can operate as a sort of authorizing fiction to elide what it contains and to refuse the existence of what it doesn't contain. But it's also very much sculpted, as much as anything else, by the fictions and the strategies of race making.

CHAKRAVARTY: And so, I know we've been thinking quite a lot about, sort of, histories, genealogies, and I wanted, maybe, for us to think a little bit about futures. So, when we think about what the archive could be and about the future of the archive, do you have thoughts on where we can go? Where the archive could or should go?

ADAMS: I do have thoughts about it. And one of the things I like to bring up, and also do a plug for your future book that's coming out, I've had the pleasure of reading a couple of chapters and it is wonderful, and something that your book does is to remake the archive itself, which I think is extremely important. Not just to think about the stories that will be told but questioning the stories that have been told and the work that has been done that has been perpetuated as fact.

ADAMS: I think about a lot of the work that I've done myself in book history, the work that I've seen with recent book historians who are questioning a lot of work that was done by the new bibliographers, work that is often presented just as historical fact. There were people who were working in this particular way, they encountered early texts, and there's no other way to look at them.

ADAMS: And I've been really excited by the work that's coming out right now that challenges those notions on so many different levels, whether it's Tara Lyon's work on the Bodleian Library and how those collections were working to so many other bibliographers and book historians thinking about how this works. And I think about your work that is both forward-looking and backward-looking and challenging some of the thoughts that people were sharing about race or sort of explaining to us all that it didn't exist when in fact it does.

ADAMS: And you're drawing from 40 years of wonderful critical race scholarship while also going back further to look at the archive and to find examples of the history of whiteness and race making. That is absolutely important. And I think that's what I hope that the future of the archive can be, something where we're able to look multi-directionally. We can think about past, we can think about the present, we can think about the future.

ADAMS: I think, if nothing else, the pandemic has taught us that time is a, pretty much, wonderful illusion. Sorry to the physicists out there, but it's something through which we can work in a variety of ways. And I think that the future of the archive is one that acknowledges that the people that go to work in it don't look the same as they did in 1935. They include women, they include people of color, they include people who are openly LGBTQ.

ADAMS: And we are going to look at this material with our whole selves. One thing that I know I didn't do on my, sort of, first ventures into this space, was I was trying to fit into the mold of what I imagined a scholar should be. How a scholar looks at early paper, or how a scholar is supposed to handle certain material, how if the

material that you're looking at is particularly emotional, you bottle all of your feelings up as you're looking at it.

ADAMS: I think that the future of the archive is one that's open, welcoming. Where senior scholars will look for early-career graduate students and early-career scholars just to provide a hand or a conversation and a space where we don't feel like we have to be anybody other than who we are. Because who we are is extremely important and we wouldn't be able to find the material or think about the material, in the way that we do, if we weren't ourselves. How do you imagine it?

CHAKRAVARTY: Well, you were mentioning, sort of, multi-directional work and of course, as you know, your own work is just so amazing in this regard because of the way in which it, sort of, brings together these ways of working with book history, the material text, with bibliography, with performance, and with critical race theory.

CHAKRAVARTY: It really, I think, pushes the fields of all of these disciplines, and brings together these strands to sort of reveal how we cannot look at the archive, we cannot look at books and texts, we cannot look at materiality without thinking about race, and the ways in which we're thinking about bookishness, for instance. And the ways in which we're thinking about fair and foul. And I really, sort of, see the future of our inquiring in the archive as being so informed by this beautiful work that you're doing.

CHAKRAVARTY: So, it's so exciting. And I agree. I think that I would also say, in addition to hoping that we see these kinds of collaborations in the archives between, say, senior scholars, between graduate students, I would love to see a future that really demystifies the process of working in and with the archives so that, as early as possible, students are encouraged both to engage with and to query the traces of the past.

CHAKRAVARTY: By query I also mean query what is there and what isn't there, right? And why it's there. Because the archive can be a very intimidating space. And there are codes of practice and behavior specific to each archive that scholars of color, I think in particular, are under extra pressure to really get right. And so, I think the archive... I wonder what would happen if could be not just a kind of scholarly rite of passage, but a space to think with the past and with each other.

CHAKRAVARTY: And I also can't help thinking what it would look like if it could really be a space that thinks with the theoretical and methodological interventions of critical race studies from a range of disciplines. I've mentioned the way in which our work in the archive will just be transformed by what you were doing, and I also wonder whether it could be a space that really grapples with both the need for, but also the possibilities, of practices like critical fabulation, to go back to Hartman.

CHAKRAVARTY: Or with Imtiaz Habib's praxis of refusing, sort of, "White neutrality," quote end quote, in order to see the unseeable in many ways. Or one

that takes, as Habib puts it, “A serious refusal of essentialism as conspiring with fragmentary nature of archival evidence to produce a kind of race innocence.” And that’s something, that of course, Habib discusses quite a lot in that work.

CHAKRAVARTY: So, I’d love to think capaciously with the different kinds of methodologies that are available from critical race studies and from critical race theory and to use those ways of seeing to reveal what is there and what isn’t there and why. So, it’s been so, so, so fun to talk with you and to think with you.

CHAKRAVARTY: Yay. And I think we’re starting to get our first questions. So, the first question is asking us to think a little bit about digitalization, which I know we touched on briefly, but it’s asking us to think through the consequences of digitalization and the possibilities and implications of digitalization projects.

ADAMS: I think, and I’m happy to start with it, one of the things that I love about the fact that so much material has been digitized, is that it allows this work to be brought into the classroom, which is extremely important. Particularly, as you mentioned earlier, about introducing students to think in this way as soon as possible. And it allows us, in a pinch and in a pandemic, to be able to think with this material in the best way that we can.

ADAMS: This is not an ideal way of working with the material at all. I am a proponent, pretty obviously, of the physical text, and I’m really interested in it, but I also don’t want it to be fetishized to the point where only certain people who need this material for their very technical, bibliographic purposes get to exist in the same space with it.

ADAMS: I think it’d important just to breathe the same air as the work that you’re engaging with. I mean, I don’t think it’s necessary to think about maybe Benjamin but at the same time, I think it’s important to consider that the actual printed object or painting. There are subtleties and there is even a sense of material size.

ADAMS: You can get confused by a digital reproduction of something because you can enlarge it, or the photographs that were taken just sort of skew the proportions. And then when you get to the library and you see that it’s actually a very tiny octavo or a mid-sized quarto, and it changes how you think about the text as well.

ADAMS: I also think that this would allow scholars who have been somewhat reticent about book history or about material culture, and I think about people who say, “Oh, but Brandi, you work on books, you also work on critical race, but you’re the one that deals with the texts, and I don’t want people to see that there’s a border.” It’s a false border, you deserve to hold the books that you’re working with as well.

ADAMS: And I think that seeing them digitally is the first step, but then seeing them in their physical space, it's important and it changes how you relate to the material. What do you think about this project of digitization?

CHAKRAVARTY: I think it's really, really important for the reasons you say and also for access. Right? To reach as many people as possible. Thinking along some of the lines that you're thinking as well, I think part of what I would just want us to keep in as part of the conversation is the fact that what we don't want to have happen is a kind of two-tier system that we're worried we might see emerging with something like education, for instance.

CHAKRAVARTY: Online education for most people, in-person education for the rarified few in the future, right? Where some people get to see the object itself, get access to it, whereas the rest of us get to see what then becomes constructed as a kind of simulacrum of the object itself. And it's so, so important to have these types of projects, to make them available for as many people as possible, thinking about accessibility, thinking about travel.

CHAKRAVARTY: But there is something, as you say, that that piece of the puzzle, that breathing the same air is important, not for its own sake, but to increase the scope of who is seeing to have ownership of, to have access to, who is seen to be able to read and touch and engage with these texts. And that seems like a really important component to this as well.

CHAKRAVARTY: So, I think it's vital that we don't lose sight of that piece of the puzzle too. I think we're getting another question in which I'm really interested to think with you about. So, the question is the following, "As librarian and archivist Trevor Owens puts it in a groundbreaking blog post, the term, 'Archive,' often brings with its notions of longevity, safe-keeping, order, and concerns with authenticity."

CHAKRAVARTY: "It's about items or records that hang together for good reason. How does this relate to the ways you generally hear the term used by scholars?"

ADAMS: That is a wonderful question. And I think what gives me a little bit of pause is this notion of security, longevity, safe-keeping, order, authenticity. Safe-keeping from whom? And who gets to, sort of, look at this material?

ADAMS: How it gets organized can be done in a way that prolongs longevity, yes, but it can also prolong a history that deters from other histories being told. I think that the act of collecting is also something that I would want to have a conversation with archivists and librarians about in terms of organizational principles. What brings these two, or five, or one hundred pieces of material together?

ADAMS: And how do we think through the act of collecting, collating that material? I think it's something that we need to be very careful about. Who is making these claims as well? And I'm not saying that these claims are not valid by any stretch of

the imagination, but how people collect also has to do with who they are. It's not a completely disinterested act. It never will be. I think this goes back to your statement about Imtiaz Habib and, "There's no neutrality."

ADAMS: And I think that sometimes people become these renowned archivists and librarians, and they have a very particular point of view about collections and how things are supposed to work, which then affect the scholars who come into the space and how they choose to think about it. And if there are all these unspoken rules about how you're supposed to behave and not supposed to behave, or how you're supposed to interact with this material or not supposed to interact with this material, this makes it just a much more complicated possibility. What do you think?

CHAKRAVARTY: I'm really glad you brought up Habib because one of the things I've been thinking about is the way in which he's very explicit that he's looking at particular data in a particular way. And he sort of says, "This is, if not correctable, then our view of this data might change, but the political project stands." Right? And so, I'm really struck by this language of, similarly to you, longevity, safe-keeping, all their concerns with authenticity.

CHAKRAVARTY: Because, of course, authenticity... First of all, it takes me back to this term, "Verifiability," and that makes me think, again, of, you know, Venus in Two Acts, right? And how do we, sort of, move... I don't want to say move past, but really contend with that pressure on verifiability that forecloses certain kinds of inquiry.

ADAMS: Particularly indigenous people. How often do indigenous scholars have to fight that claim? And it is one that... Yeah. That's a big problem.

CHAKRAVARTY: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. As we think through these problems of verifiable facticity data, I think there can also be a kind of acknowledgement that the archive does a political project and that in approaching it, we can also have a kind of political emphasis that governs our inquiry, and that we should.

CHAKRAVARTY: Right? And I think there's also a sense... I agree that I think the archive often takes on this spectral stability, right? That it has these confines, it has these boundaries. How many times have many of us heard that if it's not there, it doesn't exist? That we need for it to be there in order to look at this particular thing or not be able to look at this particular thing, for instance. And so, I think we need to, sort of, productively trouble that sense of order and authenticity and really drill down into our assumptions about the stability and the authenticity of the archive.

CHAKRAVARTY: And now, of course, I'm thinking back both to that slide you showed at the beginning of our conversation [LAUGHS]. Right? The archives and the archive. And I'm also thinking about, we didn't get to talk much about this, but

the sort of accident of the archive. The strange discovery or the overlooked, provisionally, or incorrectly catalogued, or whatever it is, and what work is that sense of the accident doing under the circumstances?

CHAKRAVARTY: And what does it mean that we talk about it in those terms? Right?

ADAMS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

CHAKRAVARTY: But it seems like we're getting a question actually exactly to some of the things you're starting to say about editions, acknowledges, and epistemologies and archives. And I think we're getting a few questions about decolonizing the archives. And so, someone's asking, "Can archives in settler, colonialist nationals ever be places that can lead conversations about decolonizing? What would a decolonized archive look like if one is even possible? Do we need to continue to build archives, and can you imagine a new model?"

ADAMS: I think that I'm going to start with the last question about imagining a new model. And I think, if it's possible, it's one that's truly collaborative. It involves archivists and librarians and scholars from multiple disciplines to sit down and talk about the concerns and the realities of collecting this material and organizing it, and all of the spoken and unspoken rules that govern it, in a very honest way.

ADAMS: And to talk about ways in which it can become possible to make this a democratic space where we don't just only offer senior, famous scholars' access to particular material. We acknowledge that the material that we have brought into this space is one that has lived a life of its own and you need to respect that path.

ADAMS: And it's one where we want to be honest about who forms the collections. I'm thinking about work that I have been lucky to read early by Dorothy Kim on Belle da Costa Greene's collection and her not being recognized as a black woman who created the Pierpont Morgan's collections, and now is and how that shaped a whole several peoples understanding of several different fields.

ADAMS: And I think that it's possible, but it's something that would involve a lot of conversations, and I hope they are conversations that can happen between and among countless scholars. I know that logistically, that is very difficult, but if I had the ability to do that, I think it would be great.

CHAKRAVARTY: And to speak to that point too, I wonder whether these conversations also could be predicated on modes of learning about the epistemologies that structure the formation and the continued organization of the archive. Right? So, I'm thinking about particular epistemologies that have been privileged over others. Right?

CHAKRAVARTY: So, what would it mean to think with and consult with the communities who are stewards of these materials, the original stewards of these materials, and what does it mean to learn and think about epistemologies from black studies, from indigenous studies.

CHAKRAVARTY: And what would it look like to acknowledge the structuring knowledges of the ways in which archives collect and collate and acquire as particular to European or settler or western modes of, sort of, moving through space, and in relation to these objects.

CHAKRAVARTY: And so, to these questions, I think about decolonization, I mean, I will say that I am someone who needs to do a lot more learning in this regard. I know that our institutions are very happy, for the most part, taking on a sort of decolonization, metaphorically using it as a term to sort of say, "Let's include a couple more texts in our curricula," or whatever it is, without asking, really, the hard questions about land or sovereignty.

CHAKRAVARTY: And so, I think these are really vital questions about how we can possibly have these conversations without interrogating the settler frameworks within which so many of us are crucially implicated. And I'm really, really grateful for these questions that ask us to think beyond additive models and that are really asking us to consider the basis on which we think about the structures.

CHAKRAVARTY: Not only of these collections, but in which we imagine the possibility of archival praxis. So, I'm very grateful. I think we have a last question, "How can scholars model practices of equity and inclusivity for other scholars and for our colleagues who work so hard in libraries, museums, and archives when making their own trips to do research?" I think that's a vital question.

ADAMS: I think that it returns back to my need to want to acknowledge everyone that I encounter when thinking or working with a particular text. To stop thinking about people having particular roles in the life of your work, I think that there are absolutely incredible discussions that you can have about a given early book or other piece of material with the people who have been working with it at the circulation desk.

ADAMS: The librarians who have worked with it for years. If you're able to talk to conservators, to talk to people who understand the material in a lot of different ways. To talk to your students.

ADAMS: Students sometimes ask the most incisive questions and they're able to come at it with yet another perspective. And I think that when you enter the space of a library, just acknowledge that there are so many people who are there who are helping you to do your work, and to have conversations with those people.

ADAMS: And maybe, if you're comfortable, to sort of break the political lines and the socio-hierarchical lines that get drawn in the space, to just have a conversation, because the people who've worked there learn so much about the material. They may not have started off as an early modernist while working at the library, but they end up becoming some of the most knowledgeable people because they live with the material.

ADAMS: And I think if you walk into a space with that mentality, then you're just more open, and you're happy to talk to people. And I know that a lot of times, scholarly trips are compressed, and you don't have the time to spend hours with people, but even a few minutes, I think, makes an incredible difference to making people feel like they belong in a space. In an archive, in a library, anywhere.

CHAKRAVARTY: I think that's so, so important. I love that idea of doing whatever you can to make people feel like they belong in this space. And I think it's so important, I know you've mentioned this a couple times during our conversation, but it's so vital to acknowledge the layers and networks of labor that are such a part of our experience. And we get to see a piece of it, but we don't get to see all of it.

CHAKRAVARTY: And so, I think the first step is to acknowledge these various sorts of networks of work, of labor, and in our conversations before we were also thinking about who readies these spaces early in the morning, late at night, after we, sort of, go in and look at the books and come away again. I love that term, to acknowledge fully the ways in which this work is possible.

CHAKRAVARTY: And they are so varied. And these networks are so extensive. And I think a couple of things occurred to me. I mentioned the idea, I think, of trying to demystify the process as much as possible, particularly for scholars earlier in their career, scholars who may not have had an opportunity to go to these spaces. There are so many codes of conduct that are written, that are unwritten.

CHAKRAVARTY: So, whatever we can do to, sort of, demystify the process in each of these spaces. Each space has its own, sort of rules, and ways of doing things. And they do operate as sort of professional spaces, as institutional spaces. And to acknowledge the contingencies that structure those and who may and may not be more or less comfortable, I think is so important.

CHAKRAVARTY: But I love that idea and I think it's a lovely place, maybe, for us to end our conversation with this sense of both acknowledgement and of ensuring, as much as possible, a sense of communal belonging.

ADAMS: I feel like it's networks of care for people

CHAKRAVARTY: Yes. Absolutely, yes. Yes, absolutely.

HERBERT: Hello, I'm back. I'd like to thank both of you for your incredible insights during this conversation. A special thanks also goes to the Andrew W. Mellon foundation for their support of this series. And I would also like to thank our audience for the lively twitter and chat feeds to which they've contributed. We had many, many more questions we were unable to get to. Thank you for those questions and please continue the conversation.

HERBERT: The archive can mean many things to many people and we take seriously questions that interrupt received wisdom, exceed easy answers, and open the scope of our understanding. We at the Folger Shakespeare Library ask for your continuing support of our work with so many audiences from K-12 educators and their students, who are served by the Folger Education Division, to fellowships in advanced programming for graduate students and faculty.

HERBERT: If you're in a position to contribute, we are grateful. Our institution was founded on philanthropy, and your philanthropy will help us continue to support groundbreaking research and to share it with wider and more inclusive audiences, just as we did today. I hope that you'll be able to join us on Thursday, March 18th for a session on reading, writing, and teaching black life and anti-black violence in the early modern world. Further details on this and other upcoming critical race conversations may be found on the Folger Institute's webpage. And now I'd like to pitch things back to our presenters to give them the final word.

ADAMS: I would just like to thank everyone so much for joining us today. This was exciting, and I hope that we're able to continue all of these conversations together. And I hope that in the future, we're able to work with archivists, librarians, collectors, different people who are a part of the life of objects and texts that we work with.

CHAKRAVARTY: I'd also like to thank the Folger, to thank everyone for coming, to thank Dr. Adams.

ADAMS: Thank you.

CHAKRAVARTY: And also, to reiterate that I hope in future we can consider the ways in which critical race studies and various disciplines can help us to see the archive in different ways. And I hope also to go back to your words, Dr. Adams, that we can find ways of creating these networks of care in and through and with the archives. And I really look forward to continuing these conversations in the near future. Thank you.