

## **Respect, Reciprocity, and Reconciliation: The Protocols for Native American Archival Materials**

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Native Americans have a unique status in the United States, operating as sovereign governments. Tribal communities have their own governments and laws, specifically regarding cultural and human rights. Just as there has been significant activism regarding Native American laws and rights in general, over the past twenty years there has been a significant resurgence in activism surrounding the care and preservation of Native American archives. In an effort for greater control of the preservation and dissemination of their history, some tribal communities have been able to create their own repositories for the care of their collections. However, due to years of oppression and termination, the majority of archival items relating to Native American culture and history are often located at non-tribal repositories, such as universities, historical societies, and federal agencies. Consequently, the care and preservation of Native American archives and cultural heritage at these various institutions presents numerous theoretical challenges for mainstream archivists who have received training from a Western perspective.

To provide guidance and inform archivists on best practices, the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials was drafted in 2006 by a group of various professionals, both Native American and non-Native American, including archivists, librarians, museum curators, historians, and anthropologists. Specifically the group met to identify best professional practices for culturally responsive care and use of American Indian archival material held by non-tribal organizations. Furthermore, the contributors envisioned that the document would open the lines of communication between tribal and non-tribal repositories for ongoing national discussions around different approaches to the management, preservation, and transmission for Native American knowledge and information resources. Once published the document was shared with various organizations and individuals for consideration, implementation, and endorsement. Although endorsed and successfully implemented by some organizations and repositories, not all archive professionals were accepting of the document, specifically guidelines regarding access, use and repatriation. However, while not all endorsed the Protocols, the document brought issues surrounding Native American archives to the forefront and began various conversations about their care and preservation. This paper will address the theoretical issues regarding the implementation and use of the Protocols by non-tribal repositories and the collaborations created with tribal communities. Specifically, although many critics of the Protocols argue that the foundational practices go against standard archival theory, the paper will argue that the Protocols actually support archival practice and theory.

Furthermore, new theoretical insight from the document supports the “archival turn” on ethnic archiving that provides new non-western perspectives that are desperately needed in archival education and the larger archive profession. These new perspectives must be implemented in archival education to ensure that new generations of archivists are implementing these new methods into archival work and practice. The Protocols also inherently support and promote the ideas of community and participatory archives as methods for bringing dispersed collections together for reunification and to enhance materials through

community traditional knowledge. In addition, this new non-western perspective and process informs historical research and the society's view regarding Native Americans, both from the past, present and future. It is imperative that archivists reexamine and redefine our roles and perspectives in the profession regarding ethnic archiving to ensure a successful paradigm shift. The paper will also highlight specific successful repository case studies that have implemented the Protocols, noting the outcomes and lessons learned.