

Editor's Note

“A journal is rather like a hothouse plant,” I wrote in the Editor’s Note for the spring 2018 issue, comparing our professional publication to the living plants lining a walkway. “Part of an editor’s job is to look ahead, to see where the journal is growing and where there remains room for growth.” I saw an opportunity, a topical challenge the journal could meet and vacancy it could fill. Our professional literature has relatively little on the provision of academic library services in terms of Native peoples, marginalized populations, and others without privilege and virtually nothing—well, *nothing*, really—on special collections librarianship. Irene Owens’ 2001 article on challenges facing HBCU libraries and Susan Pevar’s tragic personal narrative of the closure of a special collection are virtually unique.¹ The case study conducted by Sarah Kostelecky, et al. on three tribal college libraries is unique, the only article actively addressing special collections.² Thus, that issue of *RBM* included a call for submissions for a thematic issue of the journal to be tentatively titled *Minority Report: Practice and Issues beyond the Mainstream*.

Special collections libraries are already a minority in our profession. The inaugural issue of *RBM* back in 2000 was titled “What’s So Special about Special Collections Librarians?” Alice Schreyer’s article of the same name in 2006 reminded our profession that “there is an implied elitism in our professional vocabulary.” I don’t know that we’d consider ourselves elite—and certainly not exclusionary. Thinking of the committed professionals I know across the country, I cannot imagine any of them being intentionally exclusionary in the provision of service or of developing their collections, but then it is worth remembering that most of us still clearly float in the cultural mainstream. We deal with expensive books, gemlike cultural treasures, the papers of notable individuals. Having one’s life or work represented in special collections is a cachet of having “arrived” in the cultural memory. For good or ill, our material tends to be the elite even within academic institutions, which themselves still hand out the modern version of passports to American

1. Irene Owens, “Stories Told but Yet Unfinished: Challenges Facing African-American Libraries and Special Collections in Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” *Journal of Library Administration* 33, no. 3/4 (2001): 165–82.

2. Sarah R. Kostelecky, David A. Hurley, Paulita Aguilar, Jolene Manus, “Centering Indigenous Knowledge: Three Southwestern Tribal College and University Library Collections,” *Collection Management* 42, no. 3/4 (2017): 180–95. *Tribal College Journal* is a newsletter providing library-related news and information, but it is not the academically rigorous venue recognized by scholars.

nobility of middle- and upper-class socioeconomic status. Seen from outside, we are keepers of the mainest of the mainstream.

When we talk of special collections, it is worth remembering the differences in value that language imposes: *equality* is not *equitability*. Asserting a blind “equal” opportunity inherently favors those who are already privileged to participate and who benefit from being the mainstream. Equitability—such as a single thematic journal issue—provides a space and opportunity at the cultural table to prevent small voices from being drowned out or overlooked. Invoking equality is an act of intentional inclusion. Inclusivity must be proactive; those who are or who feel marginalized must be welcomed to participate, because otherwise they risk being unable to overcome feeling like they don’t fit into the mainstream. The sad thing is, they don’t; otherwise, they’d *be* mainstream.

As editor, I envisioned one issue of *RBM* being little more than a way to begin filling the voids in our literature, opening a discussion about the place and challenges of marginalized populations and struggling institutions. After the announcement, I fielded a flurry of interest in queries by telephone and email. I solicited and encouraged where it was welcomed. Even so, there were few submissions. The editorial standards for publication did not change merely for the sake of this issue. One solid article was eventually withdrawn. When time came for a publication decision to be made on the contents of this issue, it became clear that the aspiration for a thematic issue could not be reached.

Yes, of course I’m disappointed, but please don’t misunderstand me—the journal remains vibrant. This issue publishes three very good professional articles, all of which have been through substantive peer and editorial reviews. They contribute to the literature and to the practice of special collections curacy. However, I can’t help remain a bit sad that we were unable to present the special issue for which the call was made. Nevertheless, I continue to look eagerly for the work of professionals writing about service to people on the margins of American and Canadian culture, because every eddy and backcurrent in the slowest river or tumbling brook ultimately is a testament to its part of the main stream.