

Terri Francis: Hi, everybody. Well, it is the questions that matter. I actually just lost my notes there. It's kind of what I wanted to talk about. I also took Brian's [Graney] prompt really literally and also to heart. So I thought I would talk about the pragmatics and the pathos of doing archival research, how it feels to be in the archive. Of both of the projects that Barbara [Klinger] described have heavy archival components but they're different. This is so bright, I'm having a hard time focusing. I'm not used to being on stage in this way. Like my subject, unlike my subject, Josephine Baker, so in Josephine's *Burlesque* in that project I actually turned to newspaper archives to ground a project that I felt was kind of spinning out of control. I had just kind of in a way too many questions and they were all kind of unsatisfying and seemed to be repeating the narrative of Baker as someone who didn't actually participate in her own performance. So her archive or her, I guess, her story is kind of dominated by the idea of her as symptomatic of her times. I was really interested in what she created and to think about it from the inside out or from her perspective. So I ended up actually deciding to focus my project much more on her films as the artifact and doing close analysis but then the newspaper archives. But then I also decided to return to the US, to return her to the US and to look at her through the African American press, which of course raises all kinds of other questions which we've been talking about today.

I have to say when I first started doing it the randomness was actually really revealing to see that Baker was covered in regional newspapers in Iowa and in South Dakota and in Texas and in Florida as well as the expected places, as well as the *Amsterdam News* and the *Chicago Defender*. So that kind of allowed me to tell a story of her that was really about how her celebrity traveled back home. Do you know what I mean? So I think a lot of the scholars I think who were writing about her were actually probably literature people who were doing cultural studies and so you're kind of thinking about her kind of holding her to the standards of authorship that you would hold Toni Morrison or somebody who you could see the name and its documented. You know that Toni Morrison wrote this paper or you know that Zora Neale Hurston this book.

For performance it's just much more difficult to nail down who did what and where the ideas came from. It's a much more, I'm continuing to squint and this will be great for the video. It will be why is she squinting like that? She's in pain.

So I ended up realizing the kind of all of that would just be part of the story that what I was seeing in the newspapers was that Baker, thank you. Bless your heart; thank you so much. I don't know if other people noticed that. It was really intense for me and also I'm used to being in the dark. Whenever I'm talking it's usually in class and the lights are always off so maybe I'm overly sensitive to that.

Anyhow, so I ended up realizing that I could tell this really interesting story about Baker as a celebrity back in the US and a celebrity who was being framed in a kind of uplift narrative so that her stories about her weren't really on the movie pages. They were on the society pages and then the society pages would often then have social commentary. So for example, there was this story about her marriage to the not Count, Count and below that was this story about just kind of equality and integration. Do you know what I mean? I don't know if I would say that this indicated that her life was literally being

read as like race progress but just that position on the newspaper which, again, which you see when you look at the whole page kind of was suggestive of how she was being positioned or at least how people would read her. I mean you would read one story and then you just see it there. So that's that. So that's the Baker project.

Then this Jamaica project was a whole other thing. So the Baker research I mean I have to say I really haven't been much of a footworker on that project. There was a Paris part but once, I don't know, at a certain point in my life I just didn't want to go back there. So I was kind of doing this from my bedroom.

But for the Jamaica project I set out again and that really put me into content, into contact with the emotional states of handling archives that are not really yours. Do you know what I mean? I think when I was at home kind of in bed in the middle of the night and kind of looking at newspaper archives or whatever and there was this sense of control, I think, that I had over the story. But when I was in Kingston asking permission to look at things and trying to explain why I wanted to look because people were like why would you want to look at this. I remember the time when I saw the, I'm working on this collection of 1950's reeducation films that were made by the Jamaica Film Unit, 1951 to 1961. I saw them with another scholar and we were looking at something, I don't know, it was like about like what to do when you get syphilis. Don't drink tea, take penicillin and like one was about dairy farming and stuff. And he immediately dismissed them but I had really different reactions. One reaction I had was, wow, these look a lot like the early race films. Even though it's from the 1950's they looked a lot like something that I had seen in my classes with Jacqueline Stewart at Chicago. They also looked like that could be my grandpa in there.

So I had this analytical reaction and then I had this emotional one and for the entire length of the time that I was working with them and writing about them I really toggled between both of those, both of those feelings. There was a lot of weeping for some reason while I was writing this. I think I did feel like I was writing my grandfather's story. It's probably the only thing that my parents have read and cared about and I think they cared about it because they recognized that in writing the story of this film unit I was writing the story of kind of rural Jamaica. So it was a Jamaica that they recognized and cared about and had forgotten in a lot of ways. It's probably my summers going to visit grandma that actually helped me to not only recognize these films but to be able to tell their story.

I will say that when I started working on it and actually when I started planning this talk it was a much sadder talk. I'm feeling very upbeat right now. But when I was thinking about it I was actually thinking about how the ways that I felt that I had to prove myself in terms of my identity with the archivists and I kind of wrote about this on the workshop page. I don't know, I just feel really out of place and I felt at home. I know Kingston and I know Jamaica but they don't know me. I'm just some person from, at the time from Yale or whatever just coming up trying to get stuff. I don't know, maybe I was, you know, you feel self-conscious you project things. So maybe there was some of that going on.

I did feel a sense of sadness and then I felt all this kind of loss because these films are so interesting and exciting but as I was discovering them I was also aware of what I wasn't finding. So initially the project was called Allegies of, I don't know, it was just really sad. Actually, Charlie Messer who was editing me for the film history issue which I eventually published that research said why are you so melancholy about all of this. You're finding stuff. Why are you focusing on the loss? But I couldn't help it. I was really, I just had this sense of, this sense of this fleeting and also the fragility of the materials and how few people knew about them and maybe even the responsibility of interpreting them fully and correctly. I don't know.

So I guess that's part of that pathos is that sense of responsibility and the pragmatic and that that's part of the pragmatics like you really have to know yourself and get yourself together once you walk into somebody else's house really. Do you know what I mean? It's like you're not just walking in to this institution. You put your card down and they give you the stuff. Ally and I were talking about that last night. It's just not that automatic like people are really kind of serious but then on the other hand I found my archive really volatile. One year I was able to look at something, a biography from one of my filmmakers I write about. See, there I am again like owning like my filmmaker. But anyway, in the next year it wasn't there and no one could find it and it wasn't really a priority to find it. So that's kind of disappointing. So there is a volatility not even just like a theoretical volatility but a pragmatic one to deal with. You just have to accept that with patience and let that be the story, let that be enough.

I'm sure that I should stop talking at this point. I'll be happy to talk about more as we have conversation with each other. Thank you.