



## OMOHUNDRO INSTITUTE

*William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 79, no. 4 (October 2022): 595–624

Archival Violence, Archival Capital: Ethics, Inheritance, and Reparations in the Thistlewood Diaries

*By Katharine Gerbner*

In 2011, the Beinecke Library at Yale University purchased the Thomas Thistlewood Papers through a private sale. The collection, which includes nearly ten thousand pages written by Thistlewood, an English overseer and enslaver who lived in Jamaica from 1750 to 1786, has become one of the most important archival sources for understanding slaveholding culture and enslaved life in the British Atlantic world. Yet sources such as the Thistlewood diaries raise important ethical questions. Drawing on Black feminist critiques of the archive, especially Saidiya Hartman’s call to “acknowledge . . . our inheritance” from Thistlewood, this article uses the Thistlewood papers as a case study to examine the relationship between archives, ethics, and value. In considering “inheritance,” scholars should recognize not only the intellectual and psychic inheritance of Thistlewood’s diaries but also their material inheritance, including market value. The collection’s intellectual and monetary value has increased over time—largely because of the efforts of Caribbean archivists and scholars. Recognizing how the labor of historians, archivists, and other scholars can increase the monetary value of archival sources and enrich collectors and institutions creates new opportunities for reparative work.