



## Jeannette Bastian

ASSOCIATE DEAN, PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR,  
ARCHIVES PROGRAM

B.A., New York University

M.L.S., Shippensburg University

M.Phil., University of the West Indies

Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh

### Teaching/Research Areas

Archives and public memory; archives appraisal; archives education; postcolonialism

**SIMMONS**

Graduate School of Library  
and Information Science

## Jeannette Bastian: Through the Records' Lens

On the wall of Jeannette Bastian's office hangs one of her most treasured possessions — a 1917 photo of the flag ceremony that marked the transfer of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States and the subsequent removal of most of the colonial archives and records. Some sixty years after that event, the future archivist found herself moving to the Virgin Islands to begin her first library job. Bastian immediately saw the difficulty Virgin Islanders had in accessing their records. "You can't work in a library there without this fact affecting everything you do," she says. Thus began her long fascination with cultural identity and how communities "find" themselves through their archives.

Bastian herself knows firsthand about issues of cultural identity. She was born in England, moved to South Africa at the age of twelve, and immigrated to the United States two years later. She went to high school and college in the New York area, worked for over twenty-five years in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and finally settled in Boston. "Being a newcomer, an immigrant, is not an easy thing. It takes a long time to normalize. . . . In some part of you, you always want to go home. In the end, what you have to do is to reconcile yourself to the fact that there is no home."

Bastian was the director of the Territorial Libraries and Archives for the U.S. Virgin Islands for more than eleven years before coming to Simmons. She is the author of a literary bibliography of Caribbean literature in addition to many archival publications including *Owning Memory, How a Caribbean Community Lost its Archives and Found its History* (2003), and *Community Archives; the shaping of memory* (2009). "I'm passionate about what I do," she says. "If you're an archivist, no matter what situation you are in or what you're doing, you always see it through the lens of records."