

2016 LACUNY Institute Presentation Abstracts

Race Matters: Libraries, Racism, and Antiracism

May 20, 2016

Brooklyn College, City University of New York

MORNING Session

Panel 1

- Black Feminist Librarianship, Tahirah Akbar-Williams
- Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Exploring the Issues African-American Librarians Face, Anthony Bishop
- On the Propensity of Librarianship toward Whiteness, Baharak Yousefi

Name(s): Tahirah Akbar-Williams

Presenter title: Librarian, Education and School of Information Studies

Affiliation: University of Maryland, College Park

Format: Panel papers

Black Feminist Librarianship

Abstract: Black Feminist Librarianship and Black Feminist Librarians are terms coined by Tahirah Akbar-Williams. I see this as a movement of Black Feminist Librarians answering the call to support the scholarship and activism of marginalized faculty and students of color. This theory utilizes Patricia Hill Collin's theory of Black Feminist Thought in order to lay a foundation for librarians of color to approach the work of librarianship with awareness of the treatment of people of color within the academy. Hill Collin's (2000) writes "Oppression describes any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity among others constitute major forms of oppression in the United States" (P. 4). The approach of Black Feminist Librarianship is birth out of the work and activism of librarians who have come before us. There have been Black feminists who were activists and librarians, such as, Ann Stokley and Audre Lorde. Thus, the idea of librarians as activists and scholars is not new to this field. What I am calling for is more librarians to step into this field with a clear understanding of how we can continue the work of the feminist/librarians/ activists who have come before us. Therefore, I am developing the approach of Black Feminist Librarianship to help librarians recognize how race, class and gender have worked together to effect what is produced and valued within the academy. Hill Collins writes, "Taken together, the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned, subordinate place. This larger system of

oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite White male interests and worldviews” (p 5). In this passage she refers to Black women’s work being marginalized; however, this social control extends to suppress the writing from people of color and other marginalized groups. Black Feminist Librarians can support the work of marginalized groups within the academy by actively informing marginalized and diverse faculty about changes in publishing and technology that can help their knowledge production. For instance, exposing researchers to new methods to create and promote their scholarship via the open access movement and showing them how this can contribute to their impact on the field. Additionally, educating faculty about how open source software like Open Journal System (OJS) can increase publication output via creating their own open source journal. Other ways in which Black Feminist librarians can help marginalized faculty is by illustrating how using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can add new spatial and visual dimensions to investigating research problems. Last, mechanisms like Altmetrics can be used to promote their scholarship by creating discussion about their work on a global level. Ultimately, the movement of Black Feminist Librarianship serves to encourage librarians to be aware of how they can support and facilitate the work of marginalized scholars within academe and even within the broader culture.

Name(s): Anthony Bishop

Proposal title: Resident Librarian, Syracuse University

Affiliation: ALA; Spectrum ALA member since (2012)

Format: panel papers

Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Exploring the Issues African-American Academic Librarians Face

Abstract: For decades now there has been a national mission statement trumpeted in academic libraries and that is to create a diversified library staff. But what does diversifying a library staff or department actually mean? And when you do diversify, what is put in place to support the diverse staff once it has been implemented? This paper will explore the challenges with diversity and examine, in particular the struggles African-Americans face trying to matriculate professionally in academic libraries.

The author of the paper who is an African-American, male, academic librarian will share first-hand accounts of experiences he has endured working in three academic libraries. The paper will refer to statistical data to show the slow inclusions of African-Americans in the field of academic library science and utilize scholarly research conducted that examines some of the obstacles African-Americans face when vying for positions in academic libraries. This information will be used to lay the foundation and to cast light and provide support to the author’s claim that academic libraries need to do more in terms of meeting its publicized agenda of creating a true “diverse library staff and department”.

The paper will also address how the recent change in the racial climate in America has affected the world of academic libraries and how there is a need for an honest conversation about race

and perceptions of race and gender to take place within every academic library department. The author will share what he has learned working in three distinctly different academic libraries, and use these experiences along with data from experts in the field to articulate a strategy that will help break the “glass ceiling” and help foster a more inclusive work environment and culture in academic libraries.

Personal accounts and experiences of other African-American librarians will be included to provide brevity to the topic and claim of the paper and help strengthen the author’s proposed solutions to the problem. The agenda of this paper is to provide a platform to the quiet struggles African-Americans not only face trying to enter the world of academic libraries but the struggles and isolation they feel once they enter that world. The agenda is to start a larger dialogue that will lead to change.

Name(s): Baharak Yousefi

Presenter title: Head, Library Communications

Affiliation: Simon Fraser University Library

Format: Panel papers

On the propensity of librarianship toward whiteness

Abstract: Recent discussions of whiteness in LIS have highlighted the history and practice of multidimensional and systemic ideologies which form the character and propensity of librarianship toward structural inequalities based on race, class, gender, and other socially constructed categories (Bourg, 2014; Galvan, 2015; Hathcock, 2015; Honma, 2006). In this context, whiteness is broadly defined to encompass categories of social dominance beyond race and ethnicity.

With this paper, I hope to join the conversation by looking at ways in which the culture and disposition of the profession is set, communicated—sometimes obscured—and policed by those who benefit from and perpetuate whiteness in their everyday practice. While naming and recognizing these acts are powerful in and of themselves, I am also interested in asking how we interact with these practices in such ways that undermine them and increase the political capacity and longevity of non-white librarians in the field. From overt activism to subtle disruptions to “playing at whiteness” (Hathcock, 2015), we have learned to utilize a toolkit of theoretical frameworks and developed skill sets that have allowed some of us to stay working in this profession.

Using an anti-racist feminist framework (Ahmed, Bannerji, hooks, Lorde), I am specifically interested in examining whether and how the narrative and practice of “professionalism” and the related concepts of “neutrality” and “tradition,” are used to maintain and perpetuate the status quo. How are they used to restrict behaviours and decisions to acceptable levels of deviation from the norm? And further, if the persistence of status quo contributes to an

unwelcoming work environment for librarians who do not identify as members of the dominant group.

As the research and discussion in LIS moves towards asking why minority groups are leaving the profession at higher rates than others (Vinopal, 2016), I propose that the intersection between definitions and expectations of “professionalism,” claims of “neutrality,” and reverence for “tradition” are worth examining. What are the specific behaviours, messages, and feedback that drives librarians of colour or members of other underrepresented groups away from the profession? What are the tools and strategies of those who stay?

If accepted, I hope that presenting at the LACUNY Institute will give me an opportunity to hear feedback about these questions, leading to an expanded study of reasons behind attrition rates and/or job dissatisfaction among librarians who do not identify as white, middle class, heterosexual, cisgender, etc.

Bourg, C. (2014). The Unbearable Whiteness of Librarianship. Feral Librarian.

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Galvan, A. (2015). Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship. In the Library with the Lead Pipe. <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship/>

Hathcock, A. (2015). White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS. In the Library with the Lead Pipe. <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/>

Honma, T. (2005). Trippin’ Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies. InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, 1(2). <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4nj0w1mp>

Vinopal, J. (2016). The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action. In the Library with the Lead Pipe. <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/quest-for-diversity/>

Panel 2

- Inclusivity and Indie Authors: The case for Community-based Publishing, Zetta Elliott
- Whose Work Is This?: The Challenges of Building and Preserving Ethnic-Specific Collections in Public Library Settings, Dorothy Lazard
- Inequalities of Scholarly Publishing, Charlotte Roh

Name(s): Dr. Zetta Elliott

Proposal title: Writer-in-Residence

Affiliation: Weeksville Heritage Center

Format: panel papers

“Inclusivity and Indie Authors: the Case for Community-Based Publishing”

Abstract: Since 2009 I have used my scholarly training to examine white supremacy in the children’s literature community where African Americans remain marginalized, despite the 2014 increase in books about Africans/African Americans. This sudden spike (reflected in the latest statistics from the Cooperative Children’s Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison) was not paired with a comparable increase in the number of books by Blacks, however, suggesting that power remains where it has always been: in the hands of whites.

Publishers Weekly’s 2014 salary survey revealed that only 1 percent of industry professionals self-identify as African American (89 percent self-identify as white). That the homogeneity of the publishing workforce matches the homogeneity of published authors and their books is no coincidence. The marginalization of writers of color is the result of very deliberate decisions made by gatekeepers within the children’s literature community—editors, agents, librarians, and reviewers. These decisions place insurmountable barriers in the path of far too many talented writers of color.

I believe there’s a direct link between the misrepresentation of Black youth as inherently criminal and the justification given by those who so brazenly take their lives. The publishing industry can’t solve this problem single-handedly, but the erasure of Black youth from children’s literature nonetheless functions as a kind of “symbolic annihilation.” Despite the fact that the majority of primary school children in the U.S. are now kids of color, the publishing industry continues to produce books that overwhelmingly feature white children only. The message is clear: the lives of kids of color don’t matter.

Authors of color who are excluded from the traditional publishing industry are increasingly turning to self-publishing. As an indie author, I have the freedom to write about the things that matter most to the members of my community rather than waiting for approval from a gatekeeper who lacks the cultural competence needed to truly appreciate my work. My Rosetta

Press imprint produces stories that are culturally specific and organic—not forced through a white filter in order to be labeled “universal.” Diverse books can foster cross-cultural understanding at an early age. At a moment when 75 percent of whites have no friends of color and public schools are rapidly “resegregating,” the need for diverse children’s literature is greater than ever.

In this talk I advocate for a model of community-based publishing that uses print-on-demand technology to transfer power from the industry’s (mostly white) gatekeepers to those excluded from the publishing process. I will also demonstrate how public libraries place additional barriers in the path of writers of color by adhering to policies that prevent self-published books from being acquired. Indie authors and their books offer important counter-narratives that cannot easily circulate—particularly in low-income communities—without the assistance of libraries and informed, nonbiased librarians.

Name(s): Dorothy Lazard

Presenter title: Head Librarian, Oakland History Room

Affiliation: Oakland Public Library

Format: Panel papers

“Whose Work is This?:” The Challenges of Building and Preserving Ethnic-Specific Collections in Public Library Settings”

Abstract: A couple of times a week I head downstairs to the first floor of the Oakland Main Library and scan the shelves of the African American Reference Collection. It has been here even longer than I have. It is an impressive collection of seminal first editions, encyclopedia, atlases, statistical reports and histories pertaining to all aspects of African American life. I have been responsible for this collection for fifteen years. In that time, it has grown, diversified, and splintered off to create the foundation for a special library branch in our system. It is a gem, and it is imperiled.

The challenge it faces is one faced by many ethnic-specific, “special collections” in public libraries. Some forty years ago, prompted by the demands of civil rights activists, people of color, and an internal push to broaden its patronage, American public libraries began to build collections that were more representative of the communities they served. Important fiction and nonfiction works by and about racial minorities finally found more space on library shelves. Since then the public library has been widely lauded for being both colorblind in its provision of services and inclusive in its content.

But today ethnic-specific collections within public libraries are still small and in a precarious state. American publishing traditions, library purchasing schemes, and censorship challenges contribute to this situation. But practices inside libraries also contribute significantly to this instability. In America, race and racial issues belong to those who are race-identified. Just as in the larger society, the burden of assuring diversity and raising issues of representation usually

falls to racial minorities, evidence shows that building and maintaining ethnic-specific collections typically falls to the “ethnic” members of library staffs. This can be viewed as a respectful cultural capitulation by department heads, but with today’s attrition rates high and employment rates low among librarians of color--2010 statistics show the country had only about 1600 public librarians of color--there are fewer librarians present to build or protect these vitally important collections.

Along with the underrepresentation of minority librarians, another problem exists: a lack of training for all reference librarians about the importance of these collections. Without specific knowledge about key works and authors, these collections can be ignored in the reference transaction, fall fallow on the shelves, and ultimately become candidates for the chopping block. Though I do not believe it is the intention of public libraries to create this disparity in service, their passivity in regularly promoting this literature contributes to its marginalization.

In this paper, using the Oakland Public Library as the key example, I will explore how the dearth of librarians of color along with a widespread reluctance of non-minority librarians to claim ownership of these “special collections” has jeopardized public access to literature by and about people of color, and how this situation inadvertently sends a message to the community that this material is not valued or mainstream.

Name(s): Charlotte Roh

Presenter title: Scholarly Communication Resident Librarian

Affiliation: University of Massachusetts Amherst

Format: Panel papers

Inequalities in Scholarly Publishing

Abstract: Over the past year, students from over academic students have made demands to "an end to systemic and structural racism on campus." (<http://www.thedemands.org/>) The most popular demand is for more faculty and staff of color. As part of the effort to address the disparities in representation amongst faculty of color, scholarly communication librarians at the University of Massachusetts have partnered with the Graduate Students of Color Association to educate future faculty – namely, graduate students - on 1) the process of publishing 2) how to network with publishers and editors, and 3) how to understand the systemic biases in publishing in order to subvert them.

Editors, reviewers, and editorial boards all hold power, and the structural inequalities duplicated in these structures of power are not widely recognized, although acknowledged in studies that examine racism and sexism in academia. As a former publisher and scholarly communication librarian, Charlotte Roh is actively engaged in studying these power inequalities and in educating scholars on how to understand and maximize the roles in scholarly publishing beyond authorship that can provide diversity and multiculturalism in lasting and important ways - namely, the scholarship that is produced, read, cited, and promoted (see

<http://works.bepress.com/charlotteroh/17/>). Roh makes clear the existing power structures and how scholars can understand and address the existing systems in productive and practical ways.

The program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst takes the form of a casual brown bag lunch that fosters open and safe discussion, since many students and scholars have anxiety regarding the publishing process. Roh will also discuss the library's role in enabling structural inequalities in scholarly communication, and how libraries as publishers and scholarly communication information literacy providers can work to provide transparency and set shared goals with faculty to address racism and sexism in scholarly publishing.

Panel 3

- The Case for Reparative Taxonomies: Undoing Master Narratives in the Stacks, Melissa Adler
- Defining a Diversity Pedagogy for First Year Courses: A Legal Research Example, Raquel Gabriel
- On Structures and Self-Work: Locating Anti-Racist Politics in LIS, David James Hudson and Gina Schlesselman-Tarango

Name(s): Melissa Adler

Presenter title: Assistant Professor

Affiliation: University of Kentucky

Format: Panel papers

The Case for Reparative Taxonomies: Undoing Master Narratives in the Stacks

Abstract: A critical reading of library classifications (Library of Congress, Dewey Decimal Classification) reveals epistemic violence in public and academic libraries and provides a clear example of how systemic violence operates. I read these systems as metafiction that have been integral to the construction and organization of a master narrative about race in the United States. My research unravels ways in which libraries figure into processes that make intellectual domination possible, and I argue that the universalization of whiteness in library classifications was instrumental to statecraft and social engineering. My claim is that the structures that were written to organize knowledge in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have become deeply embedded in our libraries and have participated in the naturalization of certain racialized assumptions and associations. In the 21st century catalogers continue to maintain, apply, and refine a flawed structure that was based in white supremacist ideology. W. E. B. Dubois's work (written around the same time the classifications were devised) provides an important counter-narrative to these classifications. Reading library classifications alongside *Souls of Black Folk* reveals how libraries support American racial ideology and notions of universality and citizenship, while contributing to what Dubois describes as "double consciousness." Using the classification of his work at the Library of Congress as an entry point, I want to begin a conversation to imagine different conceptualizations and designs for organizing fiction and nonfiction. What if a classification assumed something other than an unnamed whiteness as a universalized norm for its essential framework? Is it possible to speculate about the implications of such considerations for the circulation and production of knowledge about race in the U.S.? Whereas current classifications provide evidence of systemic racism on library shelves, I suggest we might consider possibilities for reparative and transformative classifications that dis- and re-organize materials about race.

The proposed alternative session will take the form of a short workshop in which attendees individually and collectively draw out new ways of classifying books that are currently classed as

“special topics” or “elements in the population.” Perhaps we invert existing universalisms? Or draw new hierarchies? Or configure the classifications entirely differently? I will bring big paper and supplies so that we can all draw new lines and knowledge maps. I am requesting a 30-minute slot so that I can talk for about 10 minutes and have 20 minutes for drawing and reclassifying and discussing.

Name(s): Raquel Gabriel

Presenter title: Law Library Professor / Assistant Director for Reference & Research Services

Affiliation: CUNY School of Law

Format: Panel papers

Defining A Diversity Pedagogy For First Year Courses: A Legal Research Example

Abstract: In an attempt to move beyond discussion of diversity as a goal, there needs to be more for teachers to do than rely upon their good intentions or a directive to incorporate ideas about diversity in the classroom with no clear structure on how to do so.

What is necessary is an actual framework that teachers can engage in when they prepare their course or a specific class that is conscious of diversity in all its forms, and which helps a teacher examine the materials they prepare for the classroom through that lens.

Legal education naturally surfaces issues of race. Although many law school courses discuss cases that revolve around racial issues, the discussion often centers on legal theories and do not acknowledge the personal histories of the students in the classroom, or the particular history of the educator.

This paper will summarize theories behind culturally relevant teaching and instructional design and unify them into a framework termed “diversity pedagogy” that can be applied to first year law school courses and help students build the real life connections between coursework and practicing as an attorney. The paper will demonstrate how diversity pedagogy implemented in first year law school courses can improve student learning experiences and help with the retention of critical skills that will be useful in subsequent internships and upper level clinical course work in law school.

Diversity pedagogy exposes students to cultural relevancy and how cultural relevancy interacts with the law. It will prepare them for more advanced work as they move into experiential or clinical learning. Exposure in the first year and direct connection to how culture affects not only how law is interpreted but how much it influences their future effectiveness as attorneys becomes another way to engage students more fully with the educational experience.

As a broad principle, diversity pedagogy recognizes that neither teacher nor student are ever divorced from personal experiences. Thus, diversity pedagogy also provides a framework for faculty to harness the personal experiences and cultures present in the classroom to enrich the

learning experience. It requires teachers to continually and consciously examine the biases they may have in the construction and execution of their course and strive to create material that communicates to students the value of respecting a wide range of cultures and viewpoints.

Such an approach takes ideas of diversity out of the realm of discussion and instead focuses it into practical application that can be used by educators in the classroom.

Name(s): David James Hudson; Gina Schlesselman-Tarango

Presenter title: Learning & Curriculum Support Librarian; Instructional Services & Initiatives Librarian

Affiliation: University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada; California State University, San Bernardino, California

Format: Panel Papers

On Structures and Self-Work: Locating Anti-Racist Politics in LIS

Abstract: The tension between the individual and the structural continues to be a key issue in racial politics. This tension has marked recent discussions on the dog-whistle demagoguery of Donald Trump, the racialization of violence through Thug/Loner/Terrorist media narratives, the accountability of police brutality perpetrators, and beyond. The degree to which racialized power and difference are understood to represent individual phenomena and/or structural phenomena — and the anti-racist implications of such critical understandings — have long been sites of contention in anti-racist discourse. As Goldberg (1993) has demonstrated, the liberal racial politics that has dominated anti-racist thought has tended to locate racism and anti-racism (and, indeed, race itself) chiefly as matters of individual (in)action. In particular, racism comes to be framed as aberrant ignorance and irrationality and anti-racism as “self-work,” whether this be personal “unlearning” or individual institutional reform; consequently, investigations of racism as a structuring aspect of broader social, economic, and political arrangements tend to be deemphasized. The goal becomes diversification of existing arrangements towards harmonious “race relations” rather than the exploration of the complex ways in which such structures work to reproduce race and white supremacy.

This presentation seeks to explore this central problem in anti-racist analysis within the context of Library and Information Studies (LIS). While LIS critics (e.g. Honma (2005), Hussey (2010), Peterson (1996, 1999)) have long pointed to the tendency within dominant narratives of diversity to ignore structural critique, individualized accounts of racial power and difference continue to dominate the field, underpinning literature on cultural competence, microaggressions, demographic alignment, and white privilege and allyship.

Drawing on work by Goldberg (1993, 1997, 2002, 2009), Ahmed (2012), Bonnett (2000), López (2014), and other critical race scholars, the proposed paper will offer context through (a) an overview of key issues in critical race engagements with the question of the individual versus the structural; and (b) an elaboration of the ways in which such issues play out in LIS discourse

on race. We will then explore questions on the dynamics, implications, possibilities, and challenges of individual and structural analyses. What, for instance, might an LIS emphasis on structural dynamics look like? Would a shift towards such an emphasis require changes in research culture? And what modes of analysis might such a shift enable? Is analysis like this methodologically practical in the library world (and what are the implications of asking such a question)? If white supremacy is understood to be a structural formation, how do we integrate critique of individual behavior, from microaggression to macroaggression? Does individual education have a place within structural analysis? How — if at all — might individual and structural approaches ultimately work in tandem to create more robust critiques of white supremacy from within our field?

In highlighting key analytical tensions within anti-racist politics, this presentation hopes to contribute to the foundation of a more theoretically nuanced understanding of race, power, and difference within our field's emerging critical race analyses.

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AFTERNOON Session

Facilitated Dialogues

- Social Practice Artists in the Archive: Strategies for Collaborative Documentation, Claro de los Reyes and Maggie Schreiner
- Interrogating Racism and Exploring Identity in LIS Classrooms : Collaborative Autoethnography in Social Justice Education, Nicole Cooke and Robin Kurz
- Loudness in the Library: Talking Book Covers, Whitewashing, and Racism, Allie Jane Bruce and Anshu Wahi
- Offensive Mechanisms, Constructive Paths: How to recognize and deal with microaggressions in the LIS field, Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Rose L. Chou, and Jenna Freedman

Name(s): Claro de los Reyes; Maggie Schreiner

Presenter title: Socially-Engaged Artist; Queens Memory Outreach Coordinator

Affiliation: My Baryo, My Borough Oral History Project; Queens Library

Format: Facilitated dialogues

Social Practice Artists in the Archive: Strategies for Collaborative Documentation

Abstract: In this facilitated dialogue, community-based artist Claro de los Reyes and Queens Library archivist Maggie Schreiner will lead a discussion on the role that community arts programs can play in developing documentation strategies for communities that are traditionally underrepresented in the archive. This conversation stems from a partnership created between two projects: My Baryo, My Borough, a public arts and oral history project focused on documenting and sharing the history of the Filipino community in Queens, and Queens Memory, a project of Queens Library and Queens College Libraries designed to collect oral histories and images of life in the borough. My Baryo, My Borough facilitated three months of community-building public arts events, culminating in the collection of oral histories and photographs. Queens Memory provided event space in branch libraries, oral history training, digitization equipment, cataloging support and long-term stewardship of the collection. The result was a rich archive documenting the Filipino-American experience in Queens, consisting of 16 oral history interviews and over 100 digitized photographs, as well as materials produced at the community arts events.

As we reflected on our differing, but shared, experiences in this collaborative project, a number of core questions emerged:

- What are strategies for building legitimacy and trust when documenting underrepresented communities? How are these different for artists and archivists? Where are the places of intersection?
- What does professionalism mean in this context? Where do we need to be flexible?
- How can, and how should, libraries center leadership for archival documentation in POC communities?
- Should we build relationships before asking for intimate, personal, and possibly difficult, histories? Does community engagement create a richer historical record?
- Our positions were both funded through short-term grants. How can we make the case in our institutions for outreach and community-building work as a core part of our mission?
- How do we build local capacity and sustainability for community archiving and oral history projects? How do we create shared ownership of the process and products?
- Does community outreach and engagement change our professional relationships to individuals and communities? How do we navigate these changes?
- Why are we collecting these histories in the first place?

Bringing together the perspectives and experiences of a community-based artist and a public library archivist, we will facilitate a conversation exploring these questions, and more broadly, the role of community-based arts in an antiracist archival documentation practice.

Name(s): Dr. Nicole Cooke & Dr. Robin Kurz

Presenter title: Assistant Professor | Assistant Professor

Affiliation: University of Illinois | Emporia State University

Format: Facilitated dialogues

Interrogating Racism and Exploring Identity in LIS Classrooms : Collaborative Autoethnography in Social Justice Education

Abstract: Through personal journal entries and recorded segments of a joint reflection, two junior-level library and information science (LIS) faculty members will guide attendees through their autoethnographical journey of teaching social justice courses and their dialogic and critical reflections on this process as examined through the lenses of their roles as educators, scholars, and activists. Cooke (who identifies as middle class, heterosexual, and Black) and Kurz (who identifies as working class, bisexual, and White) both teach graduate-level courses that center race, racism, and identity in both face-to-face and online classroom spaces.

Throughout the spring 2016 semester, the two collaborated to document their experiences as they each taught such courses. Cooke taught a course entitled "Social Justice in the Information Professions". An 8-week synchronous online course, the goals of the course include teaching students about the history of social justice movements in the profession through a critical practice lens. Kurz taught "Multicultural Resources and Services for Libraries," a 16-week

asynchronous online course designed to explore race and racism at societal (education, housing, law, etc.) and institutional (library access, collections, and services) levels through a critical theoretical lens. Both courses introduce students to concepts such as intersectionality, cultural competence, and privilege in an attempt to empower them to become social justice advocates in their future practice.

Both courses utilize a number of reflective activities and assignments, notably literature circles and an exercise entitled Circles of My Multicultural Self*. For the literature circles assignment, each student is given specific roles that rotate throughout the course, which increases student engagement and ownership of course readings and activities and allow for coverage of more material than more traditional discussion methods. After each circle discussion, students provide a role-specific written reflection of the readings and the discussion. Additionally, the Circles of My Multicultural Self activity (designed to introduce the concept of intersectionality), requires students to identify their own cultures and encourages them to develop empathy by considering the cultures and backgrounds of others.

After the presentation, which includes clips of their video conversations and excerpts from their journals, Cooke and Kurz will walk participants through the Circles of My Multicultural Self exercise and then take questions and comments from attendees. It is hoped that this discussion and activity will provide attendees with some tools and suggestions for interacting and understanding their own diverse patron groups.

*<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html>

Name(s): Allie Jane Bruce and Anshu Wahi

Presenter title: Allie Jane Bruce: Children's Librarian; Anshu Wahi: Director of Diversity and Community

Affiliation: Allie Jane Bruce: Bank Street College of Education; Anshu Wahi:

Format: Facilitated dialogues

Loudness in the Library: Talking Book Covers, Whitewashing, and Racism

Abstract: Over the past three years, we have developed a 6th-grade curriculum that uses book covers as an entry point to examine explicit and implicit biases in Children's and Young Adult Literature. Students engage in conversations about race, ethnicity, and other social identifiers as they relate to books and beyond.

Using a wide range of examples from recent Children's and Young Adult book covers, we discern inherent structural racism in the world of Children's and Young Adult Literature. We show examples of:

- Covers that "whitewash" a book by portraying a white person on the cover of a book in which the main character is a person of color

- Covers that obscure a character's race with blurry images, shadows, or other artistic techniques
- The disproportionate prevalence of covers that portray symbols or abstract images instead of a character of color
- The disproportionate prevalence of covers that portray characters of color as silhouettes or other reductive, abstract figures

During conversation, we remain focused on two central questions: "What messages does this send?" and "Why is this dangerous?"

We employ multiple modes of discovery and conversation to facilitate these discussions. For LACUNY, we propose the following:

Step 1: Participants walk around an image-filled room, writing their thoughts and questions on chart paper; participants respond either directly to the image, or to others' ideas. 10-15 minutes.

Step 2: Facilitators use participants' written ideas and questions as launch points to lead the participants through the experiences of lessons we conducted with 6th-graders, including statistics and patterns that reflect the lack of diversity in children's literature. 20-25 minutes.

Step 3: Participants write down one or two actions they can take after leaving the workshop, and volunteers share ideas with the group. Examples might include "Devote X% of library budget specifically for books in which characters of color appear on the covers" or "Start a conversation with my child about the images on book covers".

The following quotes are from 6th-graders during Loudness in the Library discussions:

- "You couldn't see the hair on the African-American people, but you could on the others."
- "If people read the same types of books a lot, they can have a stereotype in their head."
- "Society is almost afraid of putting a dark-skinned or Asian character on the cover of a book. I feel like these are minor forms of segregation."

We view the chance to present at LACUNY as an opportunity to both share the insights we've gained from these conversations with 6th-graders and to hear adults' thoughts about the structural biases in book covers.

Name(s): Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez; Rose L. Chou; Jenna Freedman

Presenter title: Processing Archivist for Latin American Collections; Budget Coordinator for University Library; Associate Director of Communications & Zine Librarian

Affiliation: Princeton University; American University; Barnard College

Format: Facilitated dialogues

Offensive Mechanisms, Constructive Paths: How to recognize and deal with microaggressions in the LIS field

Abstract: Since its inception in March of 2014, LIS Microaggressions (www.lismicroaggressions.com) has grown as a resource for library workers to voice their experiences with microaggressions in the library and information science (LIS) field. Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward individuals from marginalized communities. Microaggressions can be difficult to identify because they are more nuanced, subtle forms of prejudice. They may arise from the language we use with our peers, the assumptions we make of others, or perceived compliments.

LIS Microaggressions started in the form of a blog to give LIS workers from marginalized communities an online space to share experiences with microaggressions in libraries and provide visibility to these issues. In an effort to increase awareness beyond online spheres, the project expanded in the form of a zine publication in the spring of 2015. Zine communities themselves can be sites of racial and other oppressions. Growing out of white dominated punk subcultures, zines have historically overrepresented white dominant groups. However, there is a rich tradition in zines of resistance to white dominance, notably Mimi Nguyen's *Evolution of a Race Riot*, published in 1997, and the POC Zine Project founded by Daniela Capistrano in 2010. LIS Microaggressions continues this tradition, as a WOC/POC created zine about marginalizing experiences in librarianship written for a POC audience, rather than a white gaze.

Now the LIS Microaggressions collective is looking to move the dialogue towards exploring constructive and meaningful ways in which we can understand and address microaggressions. Through this facilitated dialogue format, we intend to provide a grounding of the term microaggressions, first introduced as offensive mechanisms by Dr. Chester Pierce in 1969. Providing a history of the term and a close reading of some of our zine issues, we hope to shoulder the responsibility of everyday workforce oppression to dominant identified allies and POC by giving the LACUNY audience the knowledge, resources, and tools it needs to think critically and act strategically about their own inherent roles in the microaggressed/microaggressor dichotomy.

Panel 4

- **Missing Persons: Finding Multiracial Resources in a Monoracially-Organized Library World**, Helen Look, Alexandra Rivera, and Karen E. Downing
- **Working through Whiteness: Toward Antiracist Librarianship**, Melissa Kalpin Prescott
- **Identity, Emotion, and Intersectionality: New Research on Academic Librarians of Color**, Juleah Swanson

Name(s): Helen Look, Alexandra Rivera, Karen Downing

Presenter title: Collection Analyst; Grants and Foundations Librarian; and Student Enrichment Librarian

Affiliation: University of Michigan Library

Format: Paper panels (was Facilitated dialogues)

Missing Persons: Finding Multiracial Resources in a Monoracially-Organized Library World

Abstract: Mainstream library practices in organizing information generally reflects social norms in which white, as a racial group, is privileged and dominant and others are marginalized and frequently excluded. Multiracial/multi-ethnic people are growing in numbers and are increasingly unwilling to accept exclusion and invisibility. Research, particularly among younger people, suggests some are demanding an identity that transcends their racial and ethnic backgrounds, some are rejecting the language of “half” -- as in half white, half Chinese -- and describing themselves as 100% of all that makes their background, and still others are insisting on the right to fluidity, being able to switch identities depending on circumstances. In a society that prefers the binary -- black/white, male/female, conservative/liberal -- fighting for anything else is a challenge. Researchers pursuing information about those standing outside of any racial binary typically struggle with poor classification in library catalogs and bibliographic databases, variable language with wildly different meanings depending on context, and offensive archaisms that may be their only entry to information resources. We propose to present our research on problems with bibliographic tools often used by social science researchers to locate studies on mixed race people, then discuss how the library community can better support and represent these and others that do not fit the easy categories of standardized classification.

Name(s): Melissa Kalpin Prescott

Presenter title: Associate Professor and Research Librarian

Affiliation: Saint Cloud State University

Format: Panel papers

Working Through Whiteness: Toward Antiracist Librarianship

Abstract: Recent interest in critical librarianship is sparking conversation and a growing awareness of the oppressive structures within which our profession was developed and continues to operate. The focus of much of this work is based on critical theory and critical pedagogy. However, in a profession that continues to be overwhelmingly white despite concerted efforts to increase diversity, I assert that we must examine our work and behavior through an antiracist lens that specifically confronts institutional racism. This work has inherent challenges as Whiteness, in its many forms, works continuously to thwart our attempts to confront and dismantle racist structures.

In this presentation, I will discuss the necessary role of white librarians in developing an antiracist analysis, confronting white privilege, and working in alliance with librarians of color to move toward positive change. Even when well-meaning white librarians have developed a critical awareness of white privilege and institutional racism, internalized racial superiority (IRS) can undermine the work and alienate others in detrimental ways. Some examples include:

- Assuming that white people have the power and ability to “fix” racial inequities for people of color (and/or that people of color want and need them to).
- Using theory and jargon to validate antiracist work while excluding and inhibiting others with authoritative experience and perspectives.
- Focusing disproportionately on the contributions of “good white people” as positive examples of antiracism.

To disrupt IRS, we who are white must reflect continuously and critically on our social locations (i.e. the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, national origin, etc.) and be committed to challenging ubiquitous messages of white superiority. Engaging in meaningful antiracist librarianship requires us to organize for change within our spheres of influence: through teaching, collection development, committee work, recruitment and retention efforts, and policy-making. The work calls on us to actively disrupt institutional racism by communicating and responding to inequities we encounter, challenging processes and motivations for decision-making, holding people accountable for overt and unintentional forms of racial prejudice, and taking responsibility for engaging other white people in the conversation.

Name(s): Juleah Swanson

Presenter title: Head of Acquisition Services

Affiliation: University of Colorado Boulder

Format: Panel papers

Identity, emotion, and intersectionality: New research on academic librarians of color

Abstract: Who are we as we sit at the reference desk? A librarian? A person of color? A woman, man, or transgender person? How can the critical framework of intersectionality be applied to our understanding of the experiences of academic librarians of color? Of all librarians? How does the salience of our identity as librarians influence the emotions we feel?

Intersectionality, rooted in legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw's discussion of the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape Black women's employment experiences in the late 1980s and early 1990s, is a theoretical framework that can be used to examine our experiences as librarians who hold a multitude of identities, whether racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality, or religion. Intersectionality examines the power dynamics and systems of oppression at play for our interconnected identities.

Identity theory, related, but not synonymous with intersectionality, can be used to examine the salience and prominence of multiple identities in an individual's sense of self. Identity theory can also explore ties to positive or negative emotions, when we feel connected to or dissonance from our multitude of identities.

This panel paper will, for the first time, share the results of qualitative research conducted on academic librarians of color, exploring the relationships between identity, emotions, and intersectionality. Over 90 academic librarians who self-identify as persons of color provided free-response answers to the question, "How has librarianship impacted your overall sense of identity (i.e. ethnic, cultural, political, professional, racial, religious, sexual, etc)?"

Initial analysis of the data begins to uncover the ways intersectionality influences the experiences of academic librarians of color in their professional lives, and the ways in which identity theory and intersectionality can influence the emotions we feel about ourselves as librarians.

This panel paper will begin to dismantle what it means to be a "Librarian". It will question who we mean when we say "Librarian", whether the term itself means "White Female Librarian." Ultimately, this panel paper will recognize that we must consider the critical framework of intersectionality and the lens of identity theory, in which our identities as people of color and as librarians cannot be separated, when we examine the profession of librarianship.

Panel 5

- Exploring Civil Rights through Mississippi Collections, Jennifer Brannock and Greg Johnson
- The 1939 Sit-in Demonstration to Integrate the Alexandria, Virginia, Public Library: Hierarchies of Dominance, Power, and Control in Library Access for Blacks, Brenda Mitchell-Powell
- Dissecting the Relationship Between Public Libraries and #BlackLivesMatter, Patricia Cortez Valdovinos

Name(s): Jennifer Brannock and Greg Johnson

Presenter title: Curator of Rare Books & Mississippiana, Curator of the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, Blues Curator [all presenters are also Associate Professors]
Affiliation: University of Southern Mississippi, University of Southern Mississippi, University of Mississippi

Format: Panel papers

Exploring Civil Rights through Mississippi Collections

Abstract: When people around the country study the civil rights movement, it's only a matter of time before they look at race relations in Mississippi. From Willie McGee to the State Sovereignty Commission to Freedom Summer, the state has had its ups and downs in regards to the struggle for equal rights for all citizens. This history is reflected in the materials held in libraries and archives around Mississippi.

As librarians in special collections departments, curators in Mississippi strive to collect, preserve, and provide access to a variety of different kinds of materials. This includes documenting the culture and history of Mississippi as well as the country. Resources relating to race relations are held at held at most universities in the state and provide various glimpses into the history of African Americans in Mississippi and the country.

At the University of Mississippi, the Blues Archive houses rich collections of sound recordings, sheet music, and manuscript collections civil rights and wrongs. The archival collections illustrate how the music has been used to uphold segregation and racial stereotypes, while also speaking out for social justice and integration.

At the University of Southern Mississippi, curators collect materials relating to the civil rights movement in Mississippi, but the library also houses one of the largest collections of children's books in the country. In the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, the curator collects pre-civil rights children's books featuring negative depictions of African American characters.

With the changing attitudes towards race relations in the 1960s, one would think that children's books have become more realistic in their depiction of African Americans, but is this true?

In addition to collecting resources, librarians also reach out to students, faculty, and the community to encourage research and use of library materials. As part of the bibliographic instruction program at the University of Southern Mississippi, the curator highlights various collections and possible research topics. When discussing civil rights materials, one of the major collecting areas in the collection, it's evident that students at the university have little knowledge about what civil rights activists were fighting against. Looking at primary sources relating to the movement always makes the students, and sometimes professors, uneasy.

This panel will explore collections held in Mississippi libraries and how they address race relations in the state as well as attitudes around the country. In addition, the session will also highlight experiences working with students, faculty, and researchers using the collections.

Name(s): Brenda Mitchell-Powell, Ph.D.

Presenter title: Independent Researcher

Affiliation: Simmons College

Format: Panel papers

The 1939 Sit-in Demonstration to Integrate the Alexandria, Virginia, Public Library: Hierarchies of Dominance, Power, and Control in Library Access for Blacks

Abstract: On August 21, 1939, Samuel Wilbert Tucker — a native Alexandrian, a local Black attorney, and the organizer of the sit-in demonstration to integrate the Alexandria, Virginia, public library — changed the course not only of American public library history, but also of twentieth-century American social history. Tucker's awareness of the myriad ways in which libraries serve personal, professional, and community interests; his recognition of the inequity of Black tax dollars used to support a segregated public facility; and his personal and familial experiences with the court systems, inspired his decision to force the municipal government of Alexandria to mandate equal protection and to dismantle the social, legal, and institutional Jim Crow restrictions that barred Black citizens from the city's only public library. Employing the combined strategies of public protest, civil disobedience, and municipal litigation, Tucker's grass-roots initiative was an effort to subsume the national priorities of organizations such as the NAACP in the civil-rights objectives of a local community. Such linkages illustrate how early, local strategies to secure equal access to libraries were part of a larger context of civil-rights activities that bore fruit during the Black library movement of the 1940s and, later, in the 1950s and 1960s following the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Race, the lens used to ground this study, is an acknowledged social construct, rather than a biological one; yet the role of race in social, cultural, and political interactions is a crucial element in the interpretation of human history — especially in America's southern states,

where hierarchies of dominance, power, and control have been based on race. Library access similarly reflected White privilege. Library exclusion affirmed a belief in the intellectual, cultural, and moral superiority of Whites that justified Black subordination and reinforced the systemic institutionalization of social, political, and economic racism. The Alexandria Library and, subsequently, the Robert H. Robinson Library, epitomized socially and culturally constructed physical places and social spaces that reflected normative policies of separate and inherently unequal. They were places and spaces that symbolized the ways in which Whites and Blacks navigated social and cultural systems and institutions conceived to ensure both their disengagement and their interdependence.

Elite-White use of authority to manage the city's race relations, dictate the hierarchical social positions of Blacks and non-elite Whites, and enforce Black exclusion from the Alexandria Library exemplifies the three tenets of critical race theory: racism is ordinary rather than aberrational, racial hierarchies are useful for psychological and material purposes, and race and racial categorizations are social constructions used to defend positions. This use of authority also illustrates how White privilege and supremacy institutionalized over time in part through legal means perpetuate racial inequality and marginalization.

Name(s): Patricia Cortez Valdovinos

Presenter title: Graduate Student

Affiliation: UCLA

Format: Panel papers

Dissecting the Relationship Between Public Libraries and #BlackLivesMatter

Abstract: With the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement in the United States, the information field needs to create and develop supportive spaces that accomplish the profession's goals to include and empower the voices of communities who have historically been silenced. Police brutality and violence as well as the criminalization of Black communities have marginalized Black experiences, histories, and voices. As public libraries strive to be spaces of inclusiveness, it is important to analyze and understand how, or even if, public libraries and librarians are clearly supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement. This paper aims to understand and critique public libraries' and librarians lack of support towards #BlackLivesMatter. First, this essay will provide a brief background about the Black Lives Matter Movement and how it gained so much attention. Second, it will present how historically public libraries and the information field have excluded Black communities, their perspectives, voices, and histories. Third, it will frame the issue within a public library context to understand and critique what public libraries are doing in conversation with the Movement. It will analyze existing programs that some public libraries have created and developed that addresses, or attempts to address, the current experiences of Black communities with police violence and criminalization. Lastly, the paper will provide possible approaches that public libraries take to resolve their lack of support. Thus, this paper is a step towards holding the information field and those who work in them accountable in their support of #BlackLivesMatter. Because in the

information field, not acknowledging the lack of support towards the movement allows dominant society to avoid talking about institutionalized racism directed towards Black communities.

Panel 6

- Roundtable on Diversifying the Library Profession, Kenneth Schlesinger, Amy Beth, Colleen Cool, Wilma Jones, and Julie Lim

Name(s): Amy Beth, Colleen Cool, Wilma Jones, Julie Lim, Kenneth Schlesinger

Presenter title: Beth, Jones, Lim, Schlesinger are Chief Librarians at Guttman, CSI, Law School, Lehman, respectively. Cool is Director of Queens GSLIS.

Affiliation: Beth, Jones, Lim, Schlesinger are Chief Librarians at Guttman, CSI, Law School, Lehman, respectively. Cool is Director of Queens GSLIS.

Format: Facilitated dialogues

Roundtable on Diversifying the Library Profession

Abstract: Four CUNY Chief Librarians and the Chair of Queens College's Graduate School of Library and Information Studies will engage in an interactive discussion around the following framing questions:

- What can we as library leaders do to promote diversity within CUNY Libraries – so our faculty and staff reflects more of New York City's population?
- How do we embrace mandates of affirmative action in order to make our Search pools more diverse, dynamic, and challenging?
- How can we best encourage, motivate, and facilitate library support staff attending library school?
- How should we embrace the strengths of a diverse profession?
- How can CUNY Libraries take the lead in becoming an inclusive national model changing the future face of the profession?

Community College

When engaging in the hiring process, library leadership has an obligation to work in deep partnership with human resources, budget offices, compliance staff, and hiring committees. It takes a firm commitment and willingness to muscle through additional pathways to proactively build appropriately identified hiring pools and see the commitment to diversifying the profession all the way through the hiring process.

It is imperative that we proceed as a professional community in collaborative expanded practice by transitioning out of longstanding patterns and practices that don't improve the "who" of libraries.

Senior College

Since implementation of affirmative action, increasing diversity of faculty and staff continues to be a priority for many higher education institutions. However, while we recognize the value of having a diverse workforce, we need to pay more attention to recruitment and retention

activities that would yield better results in outreach and opportunities for underrepresented-excluded groups who wish to become part of the library profession.

How can CUNY library leaders help develop an inclusive environment: one conducive to retention of a diverse workforce, starting with the role of Search Committees, to mentors within and outside the library, to diversity professional development for senior library faculty?

Law School

As the only New York City law library director who is not Caucasian, the presenter will discuss recruitment and retention of minority law librarians. Given New York's diversity, we will explore ways to promote retention of minority law or academic librarians.

Library School

The presenter will offer some strategies for encouraging a more diverse population to apply for library school in general and Queens GSLIS in particular. First, we need to instill in members of our target population the value and feasibility of librarianship as a profession for people of color. This means holding recruitment activities at CUNY community and senior colleges, as well as bringing in the abundance of resources available from American Library Association's Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach: <http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity>

We also need to undertake some research with potential MLS students, including those working in paraprofessional positions in CUNY libraries, to determine perceived obstacles to attending library school. Reaching out to potential students with course offerings in alternate locations throughout NYC with a mix of online, hybrid, and face-to-face modalities could respond to needs of students with various working and parenting schedules.