

Article

On “Diversity” as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a range of critical race and anti-colonial writing, and focusing chiefly on Anglo-Western contexts of librarianship, this paper offers a broad critique of diversity as the dominant mode of anti-racism in LIS. After outlining diversity’s core tenets, I examine the ways in which the paradigm’s centering of inclusion as a core anti-racist strategy has tended to inhibit meaningful treatment of racism as a structural phenomenon. Situating LIS diversity as a liberal anti-racism, I then turn to diversity’s tendency to privilege individualist narratives of (anti-)racism, particularly narratives of cultural competence, and the intersection of such individualism with broader structures of political-economic domination. Diversity’s preoccupation with demographic inclusion and individual behavioral competence has, I contend, left little room in the field for substantive engagement with race as a historically contingent phenomenon: race is ultimately reified through LIS diversity discourse, effectively precluding exploration of the ways in which racial formations are differentially produced in the contextually-specific exercise of power itself. I argue that an LIS foregrounding of race as a historical construct – the assumption of its contingency – would enable deeper inquiry into the complex ways in which our field – and indeed the diversity paradigm specifically – aligns with the operations of contemporary regimes of racial subordination in the first place. I conclude with a reflection on the importance of the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* as

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a potential site of critical exchange from which to articulate a sustained critique of race in and through our field.

Diversity is the dominant conceptual framework through which Library and Information Studies (LIS) addresses questions of racialized power and difference. A trope of multiculturalism concerned chiefly with questions of representation, diversity is the central sign under which we acknowledge and problematize the predominant whiteness of our field (to varying degrees of directness and detail), formulate solutions, and express ideals, as well as positioning ourselves in relation to the racialized dynamics of the broader communities within which we are situated. Diversity is a stated core value of major Anglo-Western library associations,² as well as the focus of professional standards and guidelines,³ and a substantial body of literature by practitioners and LIS faculty alike that stretches back for decades.⁴

At the same time, numerous scholars have observed that the field has continued to treat race uncritically. As Tracie Hall writes, “If the education system has been reticent in its discussion of racism, the library and information science field has seemingly slapped itself with a gag order. While the discussion of diversity in libraries has proliferated over the past few decades, meaningful dialogue around race has been eviscerated or

² American Library Association, *ALA Policy Manual Section B : Positions and Public Policy Statements* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2013), 5, http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/policymanual/cd_10_2_Section%20B%20New%20Policy%20Manual-1%20%28final%206-16-2015%20with%20TOC%29.pdf; Australian Library and Information Association, “ALIA Core Values Statement,” *Australian Library and Information Association*, last modified 2007, last accessed August 24, 2015, <https://alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-standards-and-guidelines/alia-core-values-statement>; Canadian Library Association, “Canadian Library Association / Association canadienne des bibliothèques Position Statement on Diversity and Inclusion,” *Canadian Library Association*, last modified May 25, 2008, last accessed August 24, 2015, http://www.cla.ca/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Position_Statements&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=4713; Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, “Equal Opportunities and Diversity Statement,” *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals*, last updated July 18, 2013, last accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/how-cilip-works/equal-opportunities-and-diversity-statement>; Ontario Library Association, *The 2012 OLA Values — Looking Through Different Lenses* (Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 2012), 3, https://www.accessola.org/web/Documents/OLA/About/strat_plan/OLAVvalues2012.pdf.

³ ACRL Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee, “Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Librarians,” *College & Research Libraries News* 73, no. 9 (October 2012): 551-61, <http://crln.acrl.org/content/73/9/551.full.pdf+html>.

⁴ Kaetrena D. Davis-Kendrick, *The Kaleidoscopic Concern: An Annotated Chronological Bibliography of Diversity, Recruitment, Retention, and Other Concerns Regarding African American and Ethnic Library Professionals in the United States* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2009).

altogether evaded.”⁵ Indeed, one of the more common critiques of “diversity” within LIS underscores the concept’s superficiality and its concomitant inadequacy as a basis for in-depth investigations of racialized power relations. These critiques point, in particular, to the concept’s imprecision in its widespread use as a catch-all for discussions of power and difference.⁶

This paper builds on the work of such critiques, occupying a similar ethical and political terrain as other LIS critics of diversity.⁷ However, even where diversity discourse

⁵ Tracie D. Hall, “The Black Body at the Reference Desk: Critical Race Theory and Black Librarianship,” in *The 21st-Century Black Librarian in America: Issues and Challenges*, ed. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius Jefferson, and Akilah Nosakhere (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 198. See also Cheryl L. Branche, “Diversity in Librarianship: Is There a Color Line?,” in *The 21st-Century Black Librarian in America: Issues and Challenges*, ed. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius Jefferson, and Akilah Nosakhere (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 203-6; Todd Honma, “Trippin’ Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies,” *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005), article 2: 1-26, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4nj0w1mp>; Christine Pawley, “Unequal Legacies: Race and Multiculturalism in the LIS Curriculum,” *Library Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2006): 149-68, doi:10.1086/506955; Lorna Peterson, “Alternative Perspectives in Library and Information Science: Issues of Race,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 37, no. 2 (1996): 163-74, doi:10.2307/40324271.

⁶ See Lisa Hussey, “The Diversity Discussion: What Are We Saying?,” *Progressive Librarian*, no. 34/35 (Fall 2010): 3-10; Lorna Peterson, “Multiculturalism: Affirmative or Negative Action?,” *Library Journal* 120, no. 12 (1995): 30-33; Peterson, “Alternative Perspectives”; Pawley, “Unequal Legacies”; Mark Winston, “Diversity: The Research and the Lack of Progress,” *New Library World* 109, no. 3/4 (2008): 130-49, doi:10.1108/03074800810857595. As Lisa Hussey puts it, “While there is a large selection of literature on diversity, there is little discussion to explain exactly how diversity is defined, and whether it is defined the same way every time. The term is generally used as if there is an accepted universal definition. However diversity is simultaneously a nebulous, vague, and extensive idea. It can imply difference regarding uncomfortable concepts, such as race, religion, ethnic heritage, and sexual orientation; but it can also refer to more benign differences, including variety in musical tastes and hobbies.” Hussey, “Diversity,” 4. By virtue of such imprecision, LIS diversity discourse tends towards a rhetoric of equivalency, which conflates the experience of the groups it marks as distinct through comma-separated lists of various lengths — nonwhite populations, women, LGBTQ communities, the elderly, vegetarians, gamers, opera fans, and so on. Such equivalency has tended, in turn, to hamper deeper investigation both into the specific histories and dynamics of different forms of oppression, as well as into the specifics of their intersection in various contexts.

⁷ Branche, “Diversity”; Hall, “Black Body”; Honma, “Trippin’”; Hussey, “Diversity”; Pawley, “Unequal Legacies”; Peterson, “Multiculturalism”; Peterson, “The Definition of Diversity,” *Journal of Library Administration* 27, no. 1-2 (1999): 17-26, doi:10.1300/J111v27n01_03; Peterson, “Alternative Perspectives.”

is clearly focused on matters of *racialized* power, it remains deeply limited as an anti-racist modality, in no small part because of the constraints of its fundamental assumptions, tacit or explicit, about racialized power and difference. My concern, in other words, is less with diversity's superficiality and imprecision (problems that in some senses suggest retrievability) and more with its deeper logics, broader historical contexts, and productive absences.⁸ As this suggests, anti-racism is not monolithic. It is more accurate to speak, following Alastair Bonnett,⁹ of anti-racisms — that is, different modes of articulated oppositionality that are based on different assumptions about the operations, agents, consequences, extent, and geohistorical consistency of racism and, indeed, of the category of race itself; and that, as such, emerge within, and align with the interests of, particular social, political, and economic arrangements. From this perspective, despite its nominal oppositionality, anti-racism cannot adequately be conceptualized as racism's opposite,¹⁰ as external to and disconnected from the complex structures of racial subordination through which our lives are regulated: indeed, the integration of ostensibly anti-racist narratives represents a key strategy of contemporary white supremacist governance, serving to legitimize its foundational assumptions and logics, as well as the social, political, and economic structures to which white supremacy maintains a mutually constitutive relationship. As such, despite the frequent calls for greater attention to race within our field, it is not enough to unequivocally celebrate any and all LIS attempts to challenge racism. The "prolonged, systemic critique of [LIS's] racial discourses" that Todd Honma called for more than a decade ago¹¹ must include a sustained interrogation of the theoretical underpinnings of our anti-racist approaches and consideration of their relationship to the broader regimes of racial subordination we seek to contest.

Drawing on a range of critical race and anti-colonial writing, and focusing chiefly on Anglo-Western contexts of librarianship, this paper offers a broad critique of diversity

⁸ For critiques of mainstream diversity practices as superficial, euphemistic, and ineffective at increasing non-white representation in LIS, see, for instance, Angela Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, June 3, 2015, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship>; April Hathcock, "White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, October 7, 2015, www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity; Jennifer Vinopal, "The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, January 13, 2016, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/quest-for-diversity>; and ShinJoung Yeo and James R. Jacobs, "Diversity Matters? Rethinking Diversity in Libraries," *Counterpoise* 10, no. 1/2 (2006).

⁹ Alastair Bonnett, *Anti-Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹¹ Honma, "Trippin'," 3.

as the dominant mode of anti-racism in LIS.¹² After outlining diversity's core tenets, I examine the ways in which the paradigm's centering of inclusion as a core anti-racist strategy has tended to inhibit meaningful treatment of racism as a structural phenomenon. Situating LIS diversity as a liberal anti-racism, I then turn to diversity's tendency to privilege individualist narratives of (anti-)racism, particularly narratives of cultural competence. Diversity's preoccupation with demographic inclusion and individual behavioral competence has, I contend, left little room in the field for substantive engagement with race as a historically contingent phenomenon: race is ultimately reified through LIS diversity discourse, effectively precluding exploration of the ways in which racial formations are differentially produced in the contextually-specific exercise of power itself. I argue that an LIS foregrounding of race as a historical construct – the assumption of its contingency – would enable deeper inquiry into the complex ways in which our field – and indeed the diversity paradigm specifically – aligns with the operations of contemporary regimes of racial subordination in the first place. I conclude with a reflection on the importance of the *Journal of Critical Information and Library Studies* as a potential site of critical exchange from which to articulate a sustained critique of race in and through our field.

THE DIVERSITY PARADIGM: A BRIEF SKETCH

The LIS diversity paradigm is itself diverse. Its underlying assumptions, languages, and analytical nuance vary across the literature and, at times, within documents themselves. In some cases, diversity is maddeningly vague, failing to mention race or racism at all, even as it attempts to grapple with these phenomena in coded terms, while in others it is far more explicit. It varies further in its assumptions about the extent and complexity of racism and anti-racist solutions within and beyond the field.

Nevertheless, as the dominant anti-racist modality within LIS, diversity has tended to coalesce around a number of core tenets and logics. The LIS diversity paradigm treats racism largely as a problem of monocultural homogeneity, identifying multicultural heterogeneity as its vision of racial justice and inclusion as its central anti-racist framework. This approach is exemplified neatly in Samantha Hastings's words: "*Assortment, difference, distinctiveness, medley, unlikeness, variance, variety, and variegation* are all synonyms for diversity [...] Homogeneity, sameness, similarity, and

¹² In focusing broadly on a dominant discourse and drawing therefore on an array of supporting examples from a range of contexts (professional, regional, racial), this paper necessarily sacrifices attention to the details of contextual variations. While beyond the scope of the present paper, deeper exploration of contextual specificities of this kind is nevertheless important. The hope is that some of the broader claims made in these pages might contribute a basis for such future work.

uniformity are unnatural. We want to get to the point where diversity is not an issue and our environments are all-inclusive, welcoming, and based on integrity and justice.”¹³ The field’s account of such idealized diversity as problematically absent typically takes the form of a narrative of demographic (mis)alignment between the library world and society more broadly, a narrative that emphasizes that libraries should represent the communities they serve. The American Library Association’s (ALA) core value of “diversity” indicates a commitment to “striv[ing] to reflect [the nation’s] diversity,”¹⁴ with the organization tracking race, gender, and age within U.S. librarianship through its “Diversity Counts” initiative. At the time of the most recent update (2012), then-president Maureen Sullivan commented that, “Although the findings show some improvement in the diversity of the library workforce, we clearly have a long way to go ... To continue to serve the nation’s increasingly diverse communities, our libraries and the profession must reflect this diversity.”¹⁵ The UK’s Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) uses similar language of professional-societal demographic alignment in listing “work towards establishing an LIS workforce that is representative of the diversity within UK society” as one of its central objectives.¹⁶ Indeed, diversity writing frequently opens with (or, in some cases, consists entirely of) a statistical portrait of the heterogeneity of the world outside libraries and, often, the increasing demographic proportion of populations understood to be nonwhite, as compared to librarianship’s relative whiteness.¹⁷

¹³ Samantha Kelly Hastings, “If Diversity Is a Natural State, Why Don’t Our Libraries Mirror the Populations They Serve?,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 85, no. 2 (2015): 134, doi:10.1086/680152, emphasis in original.

¹⁴ American Library Association, *ALA Policy Manual*, 5.

¹⁵ American Library Association, “Diversity Counts,” *American Library Association*, par. 3, last updated 2015, last accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts>.

¹⁶ Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, “Equal Opportunities,” par. 9.

¹⁷ See, for example, Denise Adkins and Isabel Espinal, “The Diversity Mandate,” *Library Journal* 129, no. 7 (2004): 52-54; Charlene L. Al-Qallaf and Joseph J. Mika, “The Role of Multiculturalism and Diversity in Library and Information Science: LIS Education and the Job Market,” *Libri: International Journal of Libraries & Information Services* 63, no. 1 (2013): 1-20, doi:10.1515/libri-2013-0001; Ricardo Andrade and Alexandra Rivera, “Developing a Diversity-Competent Workforce: The UA Libraries’ Experience,” *Journal of Library Administration* 51, no. 7/8 (October 2011): 692-727, doi:10.1080/01930826.2011.60127; Chris Bourg, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Librarianship,” *Feral Librarian* (blog), March 3, 2014, <http://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-librarianship>; Hastings, “If Diversity”; Paul T. Jaeger and Renee E. Franklin, “The Virtuous Circle: Increasing Diversity in LIS Faculties to Create More Inclusive Library Services and Outreach,” *Education Libraries* 30, no. 1 (2007): 20-26, doi:10.1086/680154; Paul T. Jaeger, John Carlo Bertot, and Renee E. Franklin, “Diversity, Inclusion, and Underrepresented Populations in LIS Research,”

The anti-racist inclusion that represents LIS's chief response to this problem of homogeneity/heterogeneity most frequently takes the form of purposeful recruitment, a strategy (as the quotes from ALA and CILIP above suggest) explicitly endorsed by numerous major library associations.¹⁸ Diversity writings offer various strategies for diversifying LIS spaces, including emphases on direct recruitment of nonwhite library staff,¹⁹ MLS students,²⁰ and PhD candidates and LIS faculty.²¹ Recruitment also figures

The Library Quarterly 80, no. 2 (2010): 175-81, doi:10.1086/651053; Kyung-Sun Kim and Sei-Ching Joanna Sin, "Recruiting and Retaining Students of Color in LIS Programs: Perspectives of Library and Information Professionals," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 81-95, doi:10.2307/40324324; Kim and Sin, "Increasing Ethnic Diversity in LIS: Strategies Suggested by Librarians of Color," *The Library Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2008): 153-77, doi:10.1086/528887; Norda Majekodunmi, "Diversity in Libraries: The Case for the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada (ViMLoC) Network," *Feliciter* 59, no. 1 (February 2013): 31-32; Jennifer Craft Morgan, Brandy Farrar, and Irene Owens, "Documenting Diversity among Working LIS Graduates," *Library Trends* 58, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 192-214, doi:10.1353/lib.0.0076; and Mega M. Subramaniam and Paul T. Jaeger, "Modeling Inclusive Practice?: Attracting Diverse Faculty and Future Faculty to the Information Workforce," *Library Trends* 59, no. 1 (2010): 109-27, doi:10.1353/lib.2010.0034.

¹⁸ See also ACRL Board of Directors Diversity Task Force, *Achieving Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Academic and Research Librarians: The Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement of Librarians of Color* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007), http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/ACRL_AchievingRacial.pdf; and Charlene Maxey-Harris and Toni Anaya, *SPEC Kit 319: Diversity Plans and Programs*, (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2010), <http://publications.arl.org/Diversity-Plans-and-Programs-SPEC-Kit-319>.

¹⁹ See, for example, ACRL Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee, "Diversity Standards"; Bourg, "Unbearable Whiteness"; Mary Kandiuk, "Promoting Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Canadian Academic Librarians," *College & Research Libraries* 75, no. 4 (July 1, 2014): 492-556, doi:10.5860/crl.75.4.492.

²⁰ See, for example, American Library Association, "Spectrum Scholarship Program," *American Library Association*, last updated 2015, last accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity/spectrum>; Association of Research Libraries, "Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce (IRDW)," *Association of Research Libraries*, last accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/diversity-recruitment/initiative-to-recruit-a-diverse-workforce-irdw#.VZ1Oz7eG-OU>; Adkins and Espinal, "Diversity Mandate"; Kim and Sin, "Increasing Ethnic Diversity"; and Kim and Sin "Recruiting and Retaining."

²¹ See, for example, Jaeger and Franklin, "Virtuous Circle"; and Subramaniam and Jaeger, "Modeling Inclusive Practice."

metaphorically in the literature as calls to diversify collections,²² services,²³ library school curriculum,²⁴ LIS research agendas,²⁵ and LIS epistemologies.²⁶ In all cases, the goal is the same: the purposeful inclusion of a nonwhite presence in traditionally white-dominated library space and thus the ostensible achievement of physical or intellectual heterogeneity.

It is widely argued, however, that a focus on recruitment is insufficient without attention to retention, since, as Damasco & Hodges put it, “increased recruitment does not guarantee increased retention rates.”²⁷ Retention literature emphasizes targeted career support for nonwhite library professionals,²⁸ improvement of compensation

²² See, for example, Ellen Gilbert, “Diversity and Collection Development,” *Library Philosophy and Practice* paper 24 (2005), <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/24>; Courtney L. Young, “Collection Development and Diversity on CIC Academic Library Web Sites,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 4 (2006): 370-76, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2006.03.004; Jody Nyasha Warner, “Moving Beyond Whiteness in North American Academic Libraries,” *Libri*, 51, no. 3 (2001): 167-72, doi:10.1515/libr.2001.167.

²³ See, for example, Lori S. Mestre, “Visibility of Diversity within Association of Research Libraries Websites,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 37, no. 2 (2011): 101-8, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2011.02.001; and Pnina Shachaf and Mary Snyder, “The Relationship Between Cultural Diversity and User Needs in Virtual Reference,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 33, no. 3 (2007): 361-67, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2007.01.012.

²⁴ See, for example, Al-Qallaf and Mika, “Role of Multiculturalism”; Paul T. Jaeger et al., “Diversity and LIS Education: Inclusion and the Age of Information,” *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science* 52, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 166-83, doi:10.1108/03074800710823980; Bharat Mehra, Hope A. Olson, and Suzana Ahmad, “Integrating Diversity across the LIS Curriculum: An Exploratory Study of Instructors’ Perceptions and Practices Online,” *IFLA Journal* 37, no. 1 (March 2011): 39-51, doi:10.1177/0340035210396781; and Patricia Montiel Overall, “The Effect of Service Learning on LIS Students’ Understanding of Diversity Issues Related to Equity of Access,” *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science* 51, no. 4 (2010): 251-66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25764642>.

²⁵ See, for example, Jaeger, Bertot, and Franklin, “Diversity”; and Mega M. Subramaniam et al., “The Implications of a Decade of Diversity-Related Doctoral Dissertations (2000-2009) in LIS: Supporting Inclusive Library Practices,” *Library Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2012): 361-377, doi:10.1086/665931.

²⁶ Linda C. Jolivet and Em Claire Knowles, “Rethinking the Eurocentric Library Workplace: A Multi-Faceted Process,” *The Reference Librarian*, 25, no. 54 (1996): 103-114, doi:10.1300/J120v25n54_10.

²⁷ Ione T. Damasco and Dracine Hodges, “Tenure and Promotion Experiences of Academic Librarians of Color,” *College & Research Libraries* 73, no. 3 (2012): 279, doi:10.5860/crl-244.

²⁸ See, for example, Association of Research Libraries, “Leadership & Career Development Program (LCDP),” *Association of Research Libraries*, last accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/diversity-recruitment/leadership-career->

(including student financial aid) and work-life balance,²⁹ cultivation of library-school curriculum content relevant to nonwhite students,³⁰ and, perhaps most prominently, proactive development of work and study environments that are welcoming of nonwhite students and workers (a point to which I return below).³¹ Such writings assert that *effective* diversity work is about *meaningful* inclusion — not only the attainment of racial heterogeneity in a given LIS space, but also its maintenance through active attention to the conditions within that space.

“INCLUSION” AND THE ABSENCE OF STRUCTURAL CRITIQUE

The anti-racist conviction of LIS diversity writing is undoubtedly sincere. But the centering of inclusion as its defining anti-racist modality profoundly constrains the diversity paradigm’s capacity to meaningfully challenge contemporary regimes of racial subordination. To be clear, the argument here is not that the fundamental logic of inclusion upon which diversity is predicated has no anti-racist value within our field: work towards inclusivity, including the types of recruitment and retention work described above, can indeed represent a key intervention where racism manifests as exclusion. The

development-program#.VZ1QI7eG-OU; ACRL Board of Directors Diversity Task Force, “Achieving”; and Damasco and Hodges, “Tenure and Promotion.”

²⁹ See, for example, ACRL Board of Directors Diversity Task Force, “Achieving”; Kim and Sin, “Increasing Ethnic Diversity”; and Kim and Sin “Recruiting and Retaining.”

³⁰ See, for example, Jaeger, Bertot, and Franklin, “Diversity”; Kim and Sin, “Increasing Ethnic Diversity”; and Kim and Sin “Recruiting and Retaining.”

³¹ See, for example, ACRL Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee, “Diversity Standards”; Jaena Alabi, “Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-Minority Librarians,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41, no. 1 (2014): 47-53, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2014.10.008; Alabi, “‘This Actually Happened’: An Analysis of Librarians’ Responses to a Survey about Racial Microaggressions.” *Journal of Library Administration* 55, no. 3 (2015): 179-91. doi:10.1080/01930826.2015.1034040; Andrade and Rivera, “Developing”; Rae Helton, “Diversity Dispatch: Increasing Diversity Awareness with Cultural Competency,” *Kentucky Libraries* 74, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 22-24; Jolivet and Knowles, “Rethinking”; Althea Eannance Lazzaro et al., “Cultural Competency on Campus Applying ACRL’s Diversity Standards,” *College & Research Libraries News* 75, no. 6 (June 1, 2014): 332-35, crln.acrl.org/content/75/6/332.full.pdf+html; Lori S. Mestre, “Librarians Working with Diverse Populations: What Impact Does Cultural Competency Training Have on Their Efforts?,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 36, no. 6 (2010): 479-88, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2010.08.003; Patricia Montiel Overall, “Cultural Competence: A Conceptual Framework for Library and Information Science Professionals,” *The Library Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2009): 175-204, doi:10.1086/597080; and Rebecca Oxley, “iDiversity and LIS Education: Student-Based Groups Promoting Cultural Competence as a Vision for the Profession,” *Library Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2013): 236-42, doi:10.1086/670698.

concern here is rather that the hegemony of the diversity paradigm and its logic of inclusion severely limits the depth of anti-racist critique conceivable within the field; that it effectively obscures particular operations of systems of racial subordination; and that it thereby extends fundamental logics that sustain (and thus remains complicit with) such systems. In particular, the totalizing LIS focus on diversity and inclusion tends to effect an erasure of the structural character of racism – that is, the entrenchment of white supremacy as a foundational and sustaining element of the discursive and material conditions of our society.

More specifically, diversity's prominent narrative of demographic (mis)alignment hinges on an implicit valorization of the status quo racial power relations of the broader social surround: the conditions (and in some cases putative value) of diversity in society at large are positioned as the yardstick against which LIS measures its success. Just as the ALA and CILIP situate their above-cited core commitments in relation to a national diversity cited favorably,³² for instance, the (recently disbanded) Canadian Library Association's statement on diversity asserts that "a diverse and pluralistic society is central to our country's identity. Libraries have a responsibility to contribute to a culture that recognizes diversity and fosters social inclusion."³³ While the degree to which such national mythologies of racial harmony are explicitly endorsed varies among texts, the tacit location of the broader community as a point of anti-racist aspiration remains a recurring feature of LIS diversity literature.³⁴ Such a move effectively localizes what are understood to be racially problematic dynamics: race is an issue for LIS because the field does not look like society at large, the field's racism thus an exception to broader racial conditions tacitly located as unproblematic. Diversity, in other words, is about achieving the heterogeneity and inclusion presumed to be hallmarks of the existing social order. Any analysis of racism as an effect of broader social structures is thus inconceivable.

LIS diversity literature does, at times, gesture towards racism as a systemic phenomenon that extends beyond the field. Warner, for instance, names whiteness explicitly as an LIS phenomenon, connecting the Eurocentrism of North American academic library collections to racism within the publishing industry, as well as to larger systems of white privilege that structure access to resources (like time and money) that

³² American Library Association, *ALA Policy Manual*, 17; Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, "Equal Opportunities," par. 9.

³³ Canadian Library Association, "Canadian Library Association," par. 1.

³⁴ See, for example, Adkins and Espinal, "Diversity Mandate"; Al-Qallaf and Mika, "Role of Multiculturalism"; Andrade and Rivera, "Developing"; Bourg, "Unbearable Whiteness"; Hastings, "If Diversity"; Jaeger and Franklin, "Virtuous Circle"; Jaeger, Bertot, and Franklin, "Diversity"; Jaeger et al., "Diversity and LIS Education"; Kandiuk, "Promoting"; Kim and Sin, "Increasing Ethnic Diversity"; Kim and Sin "Recruiting and Retaining"; Majekodunmi, "Diversity"; Morgan, Farrar, and Owens, "Documenting Diversity"; and Subramaniam and Jaeger, "Modeling Inclusive Practice."

themselves enable writing and other cultural production in the first place.³⁵ Morales, Knowles, and Bourg discuss the limits of traditional diversity work (which in their analysis is understood to refer to literal recruitment and retention efforts), distinguishing the concept from social justice, which is itself presented as involving engagement with “power and privilege at a structural level” and thus a political commitment extending beyond the field itself.³⁶ Even as such texts offer some departure from the valorization of the broader racial orders that characterizes the literature’s dominant (mis)alignment narrative,³⁷ and thus arguably present at least some space within which to begin to conceive of racism as a structural problem, they offer no meaningful departure from diversity’s central logic of inclusion: the anti-racist response to racism at least nominally conceived of as structural is diversification, with both texts proposing the purposeful development of more heterogeneous collections. For Morales, Knowles, and Bourg, such work represents an outward-facing anti-racism, since

Academic libraries and librarians exercise considerable influence over the diversity (or lack thereof) of scholarship through choices they make in fulfilling the primary missions of collecting, preserving, and providing access to information. Academic librarians are perhaps uniquely equipped and empowered to define and redefine systems of knowledge that convey ‘truths’ about what we know about the world and how that knowledge is organized and evaluated.³⁸

“The collection development decisions made by academic libraries and librarians,” the authors continue, “have profound impacts on who and what is represented in the scholarly and cultural record.”³⁹ While it is, of course, clearly important to address the Eurocentrism of library collections, it is unclear how the purposeful inclusion of underrepresented works and the ways of knowing they represent is a more substantive “social justice” approach that diverges from the “representation” that the authors present as the limited modus operandi of diversity: the presence of such works in a library does not ensure their agency, epistemologically speaking, in “the scholarly and cultural record” per se, as presence alone poses no structural challenge to the research and curricular knowledge frameworks within which the works are used (or altogether ignored); to the interests served by such uses; nor indeed to the processes of racial

³⁵ Warner, “Moving Beyond Whiteness.”

³⁶ Myrna Morales, Em Claire Knowles, and Chris Bourg, “Diversity, Social Justice, and the Future of Libraries,” *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 14, no. 3 (2014): 440, doi:10.1353/pla.2014.0017.

³⁷ Though a narrative of (mis)alignment is nevertheless present in the paper.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 445.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 445-446.

subordination by which the documents within academic library collections are accorded exalted status within a singularized scholarly and cultural record to begin with.⁴⁰

Again, the point here is not that inclusion is universally ineffective as an anti-racist strategy, but that its prevalence as the defining anti-racist modality within LIS is based on a simplistic equation of racism with exclusion. From the standpoint of the diversity literature, in other words, racism is a problem because it segregates, shuts out, or ignores nonwhite people and perspectives. Regimes of racial subordination are far more multifaceted in their operations, however, and, far from exclusion, have frequently taken the form of integration, whether through assimilation, cooptation, or more complex strategies of inclusive control. Anti-colonial writers have long pointed out, for example, that settler colonialism in North America has historically been maintained through differential strategies of racial classification and cultural recognition: while seeking to segregate and maximize black populations as sources of exploitable labor, settler colonialism has also sought to disappear and/or contain indigenous communities through inclusion within the general population so as to secure political and economic control over the settlement and exploitation of the land.⁴¹ The presence or absence of racial heterogeneity, in other words, is not per se a measure of racial justice. To be included in a space is not necessarily to have agency within that space, whether such inclusion takes the form of humans from “diverse” (read: nonwhite) communities, “diverse” materials, or “diverse” knowledges and perspectives. What’s missing is analysis of the ways in which race serves as a mode of structuring physical and intellectual space, not only through the management of access, but also through the configuration of relations of power and assignments of value within the space; the exclusions through which the very parameters of the space are drawn; and the political, economic, and cultural interests ultimately served by the existence of the space (and indeed by its discourses of inclusion) to begin with. To limit LIS anti-racism to a politics of inclusion and diversification leaves little room

⁴⁰ Indeed, in its policy manual, the ALA itself “recognizes that institutionalized inequities based on race are embedded into our society and are reinforced through social institutions and further perpetuated by policies, practices, behaviors, traditions, and structures.” However, this passing acknowledgment is dwarfed by a much more prominent emphasis on recruitment and retention as part of the larger framework of (mis)alignment detailed above. See American Library Association, *ALA Policy Manual*, 19-20.

⁴¹ See, for example, Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Patrick Wolfe, “Land, Labour and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race,” *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 866-905, doi:10.1086/ahr/106.3.866.

for asking deeper questions about the ways in which more fundamental assumptions and structures within the library world operate as sites for the perpetuation of white supremacy — the reproduction of white normativity and citizenry through public library programming, for example;⁴² the extension of racialized colonial narratives of Western civilizational superiority through the development logics of LIS global information inequality discourse;⁴³ or the centering of a putatively benevolent heteronormative white femininity as the defining figure of North American library history.⁴⁴

ON INDIVIDUALISM AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Diversity's inability to account for such structural dynamics and contexts is symptomatic of its broader operation as a liberal anti-racism, which has tended to emphasize reforming institutions over interrogating their more fundamental implication in broader systems of racial domination. As David Theo Goldberg demonstrates in some detail in *Racist Culture*, liberal anti-racism locates the problem of race squarely within the realm of the (ir)rational individual.⁴⁵ With race understood as a morally irrelevant category whose invocation presents a barrier to social harmony, racism is cast as ignorance and irrationality – as, indeed, a social sickness, an aberration from a broader social order itself thus tacitly valorized. Anti-racism, in turn, seeks to achieve social cohesion chiefly through education, through reforming misguided attitudes and correcting misunderstandings within individuals,⁴⁶ whether this be individual people or institutions, to use Sara Ahmed's words, "posited as *like an individual*, as someone who *suffers* from prejudice and who can be treated, so that he or she can act better toward racial others."⁴⁷

⁴² Honma, "Trippin'."

⁴³ David J. Hudson, "On Dark Continents and Digital Divides: Information Inequality and the Reproduction of Racial Otherness in Library and Information Studies," *Journal of Information Ethics* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 62-80.

⁴⁴ Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, "The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library," *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 667-686.

⁴⁵ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2012), 45. See also Alana Lentin, "Replacing 'race', Historicizing 'culture' in Multiculturalism," *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 4 (2005), doi:10.1080/00313220500347832, 387-388.

The centrality of a liberal anti-racism within LIS is not surprising, given the entrenchment of liberalism within the field more broadly.⁴⁸ However, the ways in which it individualizes racism are nevertheless striking and are perhaps most pronounced in what, alongside recruitment, remains one of the field's central anti-racist strategies: cultural competence training.⁴⁹ Such training focuses on the development of individual knowledge as a means of achieving an inclusive environment that in turn is understood to facilitate retention. ACRL's 2012 *Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Librarians* is perhaps the most prominent example of such diversity work, defining cultural competence as

A congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in crosscultural situations; the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each.⁵⁰

In its dominant form, cultural competence training aims to enact inclusivity through individual understanding of difference. For example, ACRL's first two "diversity standards" read as follows:

Standard 1. Cultural awareness of self and others

Librarians and library staff shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of the people they work with and serve.

Standard 2. Cross-cultural knowledge and skills

Librarians and library staff shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, and artistic expressions of colleagues, co-workers, and major constituencies served.⁵¹

⁴⁸ nina de jesus, "Locating the Library in Institutional Oppression," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (September 24, 2014), <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/locating-the-library-in-institutional-oppression>.

⁴⁹ Alternate names include cultural competency training, cultural diversity training, cultural awareness training, and cross-cultural communication training.

⁵⁰ ACRL Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee, "Diversity Standards," 551.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 552. See also Andrade and Rivera, "Developing"; Ghada Kanafani Elturk, "Cultural Collisions and Bridging the Gap between 'Don't Stare' and Care," *New Library World* 109, no.

The primary goal of cultural competence work of this kind is thus the creation of a heterogeneous harmony that represents respectful working conditions characterized by tolerance and minimal conflict. The tacit narrative of racism by which such work is animated exemplifies liberal anti-racism neatly: racism is a matter of interpersonal conflict based on negative or erroneous invocations of cultural difference that ultimately result from individual misunderstanding and that achieve separation (rather than unity) within LIS spaces. In Ahmed's words, "diversity enters institutional discourse as a language of reparation; as a way of imagining that those who are divided can work together; as a way of assuming that 'to get along' is to right a wrong."⁵²

Aligning directly with this narrative of racism as interpersonal error, the ALA's Office of Diversity's website features sections on eliminating bias and adopting civility as part of its advocacy for "Diversity in the Workplace."⁵³ Bias is defined as individual irrationality, "a highly personal and unreasoned distortion of judgment" that is "usually personal, developed through individual personal experiences or environments. [Biases are] also broad generalizations that often limit our experiences with individuals—and this is where they can lead to problems in the workplace."⁵⁴ This definition folds into an account of how to deal with difference that vacillates between the assertion of group belonging and an insistence on its immateriality: "Differences are unavoidable in the workplace and they usually make workplaces stronger. Acknowledging differences doesn't lead to perpetuating bias ... Difference is an essential part of recognizing the individual, but when difference is used to generalize individuals based on what we think of that group, it becomes a bias."⁵⁵ "Commit to experiencing individuals, not groups," the page continues: "Remember that everyone is a unique individual, not a stereotype of a group. Make your relationships about the individual, not about group membership."⁵⁶ This emphasis on eliminating bias in favor of respectful interactions focused on individual identity is part of the Office's broader advocacy of civility as vital to "diversity" discourse:

11/12 (2008): 574-83, doi:10.1108/03074800810921377; Jolivet and Knowles, "Rethinking"; Mestre, "Librarians"; and Overall, "Cultural Competence."

⁵² Ahmed, "On Being Included," 164.

⁵³ American Library Association, "Diversity in the Workplace," *American Library Association*, last updated 2015, last accessed August 25, 2015, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/workplace>.

⁵⁴ American Library Association, "Bias in the Workplace," *American Library Association*, last updated 2015, last accessed August 25, 2015, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/workplace/bias>, par. 1, 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 12.

So what's the relationship between civility and diversity? If we really think about the goals of diversity, we are seeking a workplace where different perspectives and experiences can be mutually respected and fostered for the betterment of the organization. If we can create a civil environment, we will be better able to cultivate a diverse environment. And if we fail to cultivate a civil environment, all of our diversity efforts will be for naught. To put it simply, a polite, courteous and welcoming work environment furthers diversity efforts by creating a workplace where people—all kinds of people—want to contribute to their fullest potential.⁵⁷

Taken together, such accounts of cultural competence in the face of difference exemplify the complex and contradictory character of contemporary hegemonic discourses of racelessness: race is a real individual attribute that individuals need to recognize, study, understand, and even celebrate; but, since civility, as Goldberg notes, demands the adoption of rationality,⁵⁸ the achievement of civil spaces ultimately requires the rejection of race as a relevant category of meaningful analysis for workplace dynamics (since race irrationally privileges group belonging over the uniqueness of individuals). In its dominant and most polite form, then, cultural competence reduces racism to individual relations, obscuring analysis of broader structures of racial domination behind an emphasis on paradoxically *deracializing* interpersonal understanding and harmony.

To be sure, some cultural competence literature does point more explicitly to white domination as a systemic problem. Lazzaro et al., for instance, suggest that race, among other modes of difference, substantively influences access to power at a systemic level,⁵⁹ while Berry gestures towards system-wide racialized power inequities in his brief piece on "White privilege in library land."⁶⁰ However, the recognition of the systemic character of racial domination does not translate into a meaningful departure from diversity's fundamentally individualist politics of anti-racism: in both cases, the proposed solution is the confrontation of individual attitudes and (mis)understandings through education, whether this be the formal training discussed in Lazzaro et al. or the ongoing cultivation of personal awareness through "diversity events" recommended by Berry. The problem with the cultural competence paradigm, in other words, is not simply its tendency towards superficiality, but rather its deep individualism, its location of anti-racism as personal work. Racism may well be acknowledged to be systemic, but the anti-racist logic with which it is confronted suggests that systemic racism ultimately represents

⁵⁷ American Library Association, "Civility & Diversity," *American Library Association*, last updated 2015, last accessed August 25, 2015,

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/workplace/civility>, par. 2.

⁵⁸ David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 41.

⁵⁹ Lazzaro et al., "Cultural Competency."

⁶⁰ John D. Berry, "White Privilege in Library Land," *Library Journal* 129, no. 11 (2004): 50.

an epidemic of misguided individual attitudes rather than a structural phenomenon that exceeds attitudinal error.

LIS writers have shown some interest lately in racial microaggression as an anti-racist analytic.⁶¹ Microaggression analysis focuses on micro-level, usually implicit acts of derogation directed at traditionally subordinated communities, acts that are often hard to name and explain through dominant discourses of power and difference and that thus frequently go unnoticed by all except those who are used to experiencing them. The introduction of the analytic within LIS has enabled a more precise naming of the very real assaults on psychological well-being that those of us who occupy nonwhite subject positions within the field experience on an ongoing basis as a manifestation of broader structures of white supremacy. As this may suggest, a focus on microaggression does not necessarily preclude an analysis of racism as structural; indeed, microaggression analysis outside LIS does, at times, draw connections between the two.⁶² However, despite its contribution of a potentially useful analytic to the field, LIS microaggression writing has tended to forgo such connections, divorcing its presentation of daily psychological assaults from analysis of their broader contexts of structural violence. But there is more at stake here than the omission of analysis beyond a project's scope: by presenting the phenomenon in behavioral terms, LIS microaggression analysis effectively operates within the cultural competence paradigm, even if it does not name itself as such, reproducing the model's fundamentally individualist anti-racist logics. Absent a meaningful acknowledgement of their structural context, racial microaggressions appear as acts of personal misjudgment, the result of misguided attitudes and cultural misunderstanding to be countered with individual awareness and behavior modification.⁶³

DIVERSITY AND THE PROBLEM OF ESSENTIALISM

Given its twin focus on demographics and cultural awareness, it is perhaps not surprising that diversity literature offers no meaningful account of race as a social

⁶¹ See Alabi, "Racial Microaggressions" and "'This Actually Happened;'" and the Microaggressions in Librarianship project (<http://lismicroaggressions.tumblr.com>).

⁶² See, for example, Lindsay Pérez Huber and Daniel G. Solorzano, "Racial Microaggressions as a Tool for Critical Race Research," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 18, no. 3 (2014): 297-320, doi:10.1080/13613324.2014.994173.

⁶³ The implications of the diversity paradigm's individualist racial politics might be investigated in more depth through David Theo Goldberg's concept of "racial neoliberalism." This concept may prove useful for scholars interested in exploring the alignment of contemporary structures of racial subordination with the elevation of the individual under neoliberal social, political, and economic formations. See Goldberg, *Threat*.

construct, effectively advancing an essentialist understanding of racial difference, one in which, to cite Joan Scott, “identity is taken as the referential sign of a fixed set of customs, practices, and meanings, an enduring heritage, a readily identifiable sociological category, a set of shared traits and/or experiences.”⁶⁴ Critics outside LIS have long observed that the treatment of race as a discrete, *a priori* attribute demarcating unchanging group belonging is indeed characteristic of dominant discourses of diversity more generally.⁶⁵ While it is unlikely that LIS diversity writers would explicitly link such fixity to inherent biological difference, the field’s diversity paradigm nevertheless achieves a similar reification: race is a distinct, transcendent facet of human difference, one whose certainty allows it to be named, counted, and analyzed statistically (demographics), as well as to be studied, understood, and respected (if, as suggested earlier, ultimately deemed immaterial) as a factor determining behavior in self and other (cultural competence), whether this be modes of learning, communication, or thought. Indeed, without the naturalization of such difference, much of the anti-racist strategy articulated within the diversity literature becomes difficult to sustain.

My aim here is not to advance a simple anti-essentialism, however: the assertion of the social constructedness of race is not an end in itself. Anti-essentialism is indeed far too easily co-opted in support of the claims to colorblindness that, as suggested above, dominate contemporary racial discourse: race is a construction so race is a fiction, the story goes, and underneath it all, we are all human. Through the lens of such postracialism, any invocation of racial difference (including that made by nonwhite communities in the course of seeking redress) is in turn seen to be counterproductive, divisive – indeed, to represent racism itself.⁶⁶ Contra such postracialist appropriations, this paper understands the assertion of race’s constructedness not as an answer, to paraphrase Patrick Wolfe, but as a set of questions, a catalyst for inquiry into the specific ways in which race is constructed; the variations that characterize its construction across

⁶⁴ Joan W. Scott, “Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity,” *October* 61 (1992): 14, doi:10.2307/778780.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, “Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of ‘Happy Talk,’” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007): 895-914, doi:10.2307/25472502; Drucilla Cornell and Susan Murphy, “Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and the Ethics of Identification,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 28, no. 4 (2002): 419-449, doi:10.1177/0191453702028004526; Sneja Gunew, *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Scott, “Multiculturalism”; Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Lentin, “Replacing ‘Race.’”

⁶⁶ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Goldberg, *Threat of Race*; Ian Haney-López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

different contexts; and the structures of political and economic interest served by its construction.⁶⁷ Sunera Thobani, for instance, critiques diversity's naturalization of difference as a mode of governance, situating (Canadian) multiculturalism as an example of what she calls the "communalizing power" of the state — "that is, a power which constitutes communities as discrete racial, ethnic, and cultural groups existing within its territorial borders, yet outside the symbolic bounds of the nation:"

The constitution of certain sectors of the population as cultural communities within state policy seeks to homogenize them as natural social groups, the distinguishing of which then becomes the modality of their governance. Multiculturalism constructs communities as neatly bounded, separate cultural entities, unchanged by the process of migration and dislocation. Such entities are perceived as untouched by either the external factors within which their cultural practices take place, which change the histories and destinies of the nation, or by the changing realities within the geopolitical order.⁶⁸

A recognition of race's social constructedness – its treatment, that is, as a precarious product of history – is not an assertion of its immateriality, then, but an opportunity to examine the very workings of its materiality as a site for the exercise of power within regimes of racial subordination. Such an opportunity is therefore largely missed in the LIS diversity paradigm, which has mostly tended to reproduce the naturalized accounts of racial difference that animate structures of white supremacist governance.

ON THE TREATMENT OF RACE AS HISTORICALLY CONTINGENT: POSSIBILITIES FOR LIS

The dominance of diversity's essentializing, individualist anti-racist politics in LIS has inhibited treatment of regimes of racial subordination as sociohistorical constructs. What kinds of analysis might the treatment of race as a historically constituted phenomenon enable within the field, then? What lines of inquiry open up in LIS when we approach race as a formation produced *in* and *through* the exercise of power rather than as a natural, preexistent, and unchanging demographic attribute around which "race relations" are organized?

For one, the adoption of such an analytical approach would allow us to examine the ways in which LIS serves as a site in and through which racialized difference itself is

⁶⁷ Patrick Wolfe, "Comparing Colonial and Racial Regimes," YouTube video, 48:14, posted by "American University of Beirut," June 17, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwj5bcLG8ic>.

⁶⁸ Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 149.

not simply addressed, but (re)produced. Moving beyond diversity's (ac)counting of difference presumed static, such work would involve inquiry into the specificities of racialized and racializing knowledge production in different LIS contexts, as well as their intersection with the macro- and micro-dynamics of white supremacist power relations. From this perspective, we might ask questions, for example, about the ways in which the library Twittersphere's overwhelming exaltation of the Ferguson and Baltimore public libraries as "oases of calm" and "safe havens from civil unrest" during the mass demonstrations following the police killings of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray worked to reinforce racially coded narratives of unruliness, respectability, neutrality, and institutional benevolence and heroism.⁶⁹ In the wake of the protests, corporate media environments were predictably flooded with stock narratives that cast black community mobilization as instigative of civic instability and threatening to domestic security, narratives themselves deeply anchored in the mythologies of blackness as always already disorderly that animate broader white supremacist structures of juridical (and extra-judicial) violence and labor exploitation. Ironically, one of the central moves of the protests has been the interrogation of normative discourses of violence and civic stability as an erasure of the structural normalcy of anti-black violence: in the words of a recurring chant of the Movement for Black Lives, the system isn't broken – it was built this way. We might bring such critiques of racialized narratives of civic instability to bear on an exploration of the discursive universe created by the library Twittersphere's lionization of the Ferguson and Baltimore public libraries as examples of institutional heroism (and their subsequent praise through award ceremonies and substantial donations⁷⁰), a universe within which the public library is exalted as a neutral space of reprieve from unrest defined tacitly by the presence of mass black mobilization; the civic unrest of anti-black state violence is an everyday reality, after all, but remains unrecognized as a backdrop for

⁶⁹ Colleen Curry and Micah Grimes, "Ferguson Library Becomes Refuge for Adults and Children Amid Strife," *ABC News*, August 20, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/ferguson-library-refuge-adults-children-amid-strife/story?id=25050930>; Lisa Peet, "Baltimore's Enoch Pratt Free Library Provides Haven in Troubled Times," *Library Journal*, May 5, 2015, <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2015/05/public-services/baltimores-enoch-pratt-free-library-provides-haven-in-troubled-times>.

⁷⁰ Scott Bonner, interview by Steve Thomas, *Circulating Ideas*, podcast audio, December 9, 2014, circulatingideas.com/transcripts/scott-bonner; Andrew Albanese, "ALA 2015: Pelosi Honors Baltimore Librarians for 'Heroic' Work During Unrest," *Publishers Weekly*, June 27, 2015, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/conferences/article/67339-ala-2015-pelosi-honors-baltimore-librarians-for-heroic-work-during-unrest.html>; Mary Carole McCauley, "Netscape Founder, Wife Donate \$170,000 in Computers to Pratt Library," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 20, 2015, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/arts/bs-ae-pratt-donation-20150520-story.html>.

putatively heroic decisions to remain open.⁷¹ We might further situate such inquiry within the broader context of respectability politics (specifically, the location of scholarly competence as a marker of black life worth protecting), as well as the long history within which North American public libraries have mobilized discourses of information poverty to position themselves as civilizing forces in subordinated communities.⁷²

We might unpack similarly complex dynamics of racialization through an investigation of LIS intellectual freedom discourse as a site for the tacit reinforcement of well-documented colonial narratives of barbaric Islamic enmity and civilized (white) Western innocence. How, for instance, might we draw on the widely regarded work of Edward Said and other critics of Islamophobic colonial discourse⁷³ to unpack the racially coded discursive dynamics of the widespread LIS recourse to narratives of freedom of expression in outrage at the 2015 attacks on the offices of the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, when read against the relative silence on the killing of seventeen Palestinian journalists by Israeli security forces during the 2014 assault on Gaza? How might such analysis inform a critical reading of the virtual absence of staunch intellectual freedom perspectives in the Concordia University Library's 2015 involvement in the weeding of "inappropriate" materials from the campus Muslim Student Association library, an exercise framed by the university as helping "to ensure that the contents respect the law and reflect the values of the institution and our society"?⁷⁴ How, similarly, might we use anti-colonial critiques of the temporal othering of indigenous culture to interrogate the library world's frequent expressions of concern with the destruction of "ancient" cultural artifacts in East Asia and comparative collective silence on the destruction of

⁷¹ Since the time of this writing, Maura Seale has explored similar questions through an analysis of the reproduction of narratives of black criminality in library discourse around the Ferguson Public Library's decision to stay open. Seale argues that the unfortunate perpetuation of such narratives was enabled by a broader mythology of the library as a neutral space of public good, an argument she situates within a broader critique of ALA's articulated core values of *The Public Good* and *Democracy*. See Maura Seale, "Compliant Trust: The Public Good and Democracy in the ALA's 'Core Values of Librarianship,'" *Library Trends* 64, no. 3 (2016): 585-603, doi:10.1353/lib.2016.0003.

⁷² See, for example, Jutta Haider and David Bawden, "Conceptions of 'Information Poverty' in LIS: A Discourse Analysis," *Journal of Documentation* 63, no. 4 (2007): 534-57, doi:10.1108/00220410710759002; and Pawley, "Unequal Legacies," 158-159.

⁷³ See Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, rev. ed., (New York: Vintage Books, 1997) and *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). See also, for example, Karim H. Karim, *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2000); and Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

⁷⁴ Michelle Lalonde, "Concordia Librarians to Help Muslim Students Cull 'Inappropriate' Books," *Montreal Gazette*, March 5, 2015, <http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/concordia-librarians-to-help-muslim-students-cull-inappropriate-books>, par. 5.

contemporary lives (largely unrecognized as culture worth protecting) through Western drone strikes, sanctions, and invasion?

A detailed exploration of the complex workings of race in each of these cases is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper. The pursuit of such analysis, however, requires a recognition that race is constructed not only through what is examined and asserted, but also through what remains unacknowledged and unspoken: LIS continues to operate as a space through which white supremacist racial mythologies are extended (and their attendant material structures reinforced) largely because of diversity's analytic incapacity in accounting for histories of racialization that extend beyond the field's limits, whether it be the long North American history by which criminalized black subjectivities are neutralized into respectability through white institutional validation, or the history of Western colonial knowledge production about the "Orient" through which racialized narratives of Islamic barbarity and Western civilizational superiority have continued to be articulated. Absent an accounting for the weight of such broader contexts, the operations of LIS as a site for racialized knowledge production remain largely inaccessible to critique: the celebration of a public library's openness or the condemnation of an attack on the offices of a magazine appear simply as expressions of universal professional values, largely, if not entirely, disconnected from broader processes of racialization.

When we talk race in LIS, in other words, we need to recognize that the contexts within which we talk are constitutive of the racial identities and mythologies that we are referencing – that racial formations, in short, are contingent. Such a recognition, in turn, requires a historicization of race itself: the production of racial difference is not a transhistorical phenomenon, but complex and constantly shifting, according to the needs of structures of domination at any given time and place – a point that LIS's dominant narrative of diversity and inclusion ultimately obscures. As Goldberg puts it,

Conceptually, *race* is chameleonic and parasitic in character: It insinuates itself into and appropriates as its own mode more legitimate forms of social and scientific expression. Racialized discourse is able to modify its mode of articulation. It can thus assume significance at a specific time in terms of prevailing scientific and social theories and on the basis of established cultural and political values.⁷⁵

Indeed, a key focus of contemporary critical race theory has been the racially coded operations of ostensibly race-neutral concepts like immigration, crime, terrorism,

⁷⁵ Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 107.

poverty, and so on.⁷⁶ Following such work, inquiry into the workings of race from an LIS perspective would do well to pursue analysis of the racialized dynamics of traditional (and traditionally universalized) LIS concerns like literacy, privacy, intellectual freedom, and, as I have suggested elsewhere, information inequality, concepts that, while putatively race-neutral, nevertheless operate in racially coded ways.⁷⁷

As this suggests, if we are to take seriously the assertion that race is historically constructed and contingent, then our historicization of race must go beyond the contextualization of racial identities to a contextualization of the regimes of racial governance within which such identities are constructed in the first place. From this perspective, those of us concerned with race in LIS might move beyond the exaltation of diversity as the eternal, quintessential anti-racist truth, situating it instead as a particular strategy of racial governance that has emerged (and been contested) in a particular context in a mutually mediating relationship to particular social, political, and economic arrangements. Specifically, critical race scholars point to what has come to be known as the post-war shift, a transformation of hegemonic racial discourse in Western states since the end of World War II that functioned as a means of reconfiguring governance of differentiated populations within a rapidly changing post-war environment. In the face of the horrors of the Holocaust, the demands of anti-colonial and civil rights movements, and the international investment and immigrant labor needs of post-war Western states, the racial science that had explicitly informed so much official policy was no longer tenable, given its overt hostility to difference. This posed the problem of how to maintain the racially differentiated structures of internally and externally enacted colonial exploitation and dispossession upon which Western states had historically depended for their very existence. The solution has taken the form of an intensified (if gradual and temporally uneven) retreat from explicit invocations of biological conceptions of race in official discourse, coupled with the gradual ascendancy of culture-based accounts of difference, chiefly (if not always explicitly) multiculturalism and its attendant trope of diversity. As a state-sanctioned account of difference, multiculturalism has served as a vehicle for incorporating institutionally validated nonwhite populations within the structural bounds of the nation, as well as a framework for reproducing such populations' differentiation and subordination in ostensibly deracialized terms like culture, nation, and religion.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See, for instance, *ibid.*; Haney-López, *Dog Whistle Politics*; and John Solomos, "Conceptualising Racisms: Social Theory, Politics, and Research," *Sociology* 28, no. 1 (1994): 143-61. doi:10.1177/0038038594028001009.

⁷⁷ Much as the oft-referenced, albeit bizarre, construction of the "diverse librarian" serves as a marker for nonwhite librarians even as race remains nominally absent.

⁷⁸ Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Christina Gabriel, *Selling Diversity: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity, and Globalization* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002); David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001); Ghassan Hage, *White Nation:*

The traditional discourse of diversity that dominates LIS literature of racial difference needs to be understood, then, not as a timeless anti-racist counterweight to an ahistorically conceived white supremacy, but as a phenomenon that has emerged as part of the broader adoption of nominally anti-racist rhetoric as a recuperative measure within white supremacy itself: far from over, the material conditions of racial domination and their readily available (if always precarious) taxonomies of difference persist, even as their reproduction in deracialized terms has afforded a means of situating a putatively anti-racist present as a foil against which to define racism as a relic of an unfortunate past. Since LIS literature has largely chosen to celebrate diversity as an eternal value, however, rather than treating it as a historical construct, there has been little room for meaningful exploration of the complex ways in which such historical context has itself shaped anti-racist dynamics within the field.

ON CRITICAL ANTI-RACIST SPACES IN LIS

It is worth acknowledging, following Ahmed, that diversity is often the only concept made available for addressing difference within certain institutional environments; and that, working within such institutions' rhetorical constraints, folks nevertheless take up the concept as a vehicle for advancing particular conversations about race and power.⁷⁹ It is worth reemphasizing, moreover, that my argument has not been that all LIS work carried out under the banner of diversity is directly and thoroughly complicit with the very white domination it seeks to challenge, nor, indeed, that such work as no value: my experience in LIS as a white-dominated space would, I imagine, be noticeably different if more folks in the field were conscious of racial microaggressions, if collections were less Eurocentric, and if, indeed, there were more nonwhite library workers in the field (and systems in place to support us).

But the hegemony of diversity as anti-racist modality in LIS remains deeply problematic nonetheless. To be sure, some LIS writing on race (such as work by de Jesus, Honma, Peterson, Pawley, and Schlesselman-Tarango) does diverge substantively from the diversity paradigm, engaging the field instead as a site through which regimes of racial subordination are reproduced;⁸⁰ such work might therefore be taken as points of

Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society (New York: Routledge, 2000); Lentin, "Replacing 'Race'"; Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*; Howard Winant, *The World Is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

⁷⁹ Ahmed, *On Being Included*.

⁸⁰ de Jesus, "Locating the Library"; Honma, "Trippin'"; Pawley, "Unequal Legacies"; Peterson, "Alternative Perspectives"; Schlesselman-Tarango, "The Legacy."

departure for those wishing pursue inquiry of this kind further. However, work of this kind has yet to be integrated into a substantive philosophical and methodological shift within LIS, with the dominance of diversity in writing on race continuing to represent a profound conceptual limitation, inhibiting sustained critical engagement and translating, ultimately, into complicity with the very structures of racial subordination whose existence it largely ignores.

Indeed, a meaningful shift away from the diversity paradigm and its pitfalls cannot be achieved through individual writings alone; it requires the purposeful creation of spaces within which such work can be undertaken in an ongoing way. In this light, the launch of *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies (JCLIS)* represents a crucial contribution to critical race work within the field. Race remains undertheorized in the field in no small part because of the overwhelming LIS emphasis on the practical and the technical, and the attendant failure to recognize inquiry into matters of power and meaning as a worthwhile undertaking in its own right: it is difficult to undertake sustained collective discussions of theory, culture, and history when the vast majority of the intellectual output in the field collectively teaches us that research is best when it is accompanied by commodity solutions in the form of concrete policy recommendations, competencies, standards, activities, and other things that can be captured in bullet-pointed lists. It is hard to inquire deeply into broad social phenomena like race whose historical operations are complex, constantly shifting, and often contradictory where the methodologies upon which such inquiry turns tend to be dismissed, implicitly or explicitly, as impractical. As such, the potential importance of *JCLIS* as a site of analytically rigorous discussions of race lies not only in its crucially direct naming of race and coloniality as legitimate ethical and political concerns worthy of LIS research attention, but also in its expressed commitment to serving as a platform for a broader critical theoretical engagement with the terms and approaches of the field: it is difficult to proceed beyond the broad strokes outlined in the pages above to a more nuanced interrogation of the complex reproduction of structures of racial subordination through LIS if one is limited by methodological imperatives of simplicity, practicality, and recognizability.

Finally, the methodological deepening of anti-racist critique in LIS enabled through spaces of analytical exchange such as *JCLIS* might itself lead us to a more general rethinking of the boundaries of our work. Anti-racism remains limited to the extent (a) that it conceives of racism as residing within the bounded spaces of specific actors, organizations, and disciplines, and (b) that it in turn seeks simply to excise it from such spaces through diversification and cultural awareness training — as if the boundaries of our professional and intellectual spaces and practices were somehow impermeable. Indeed, the corollary to a call to more rigorously and collectively engage with the well-established bodies of critical race analysis external to the field⁸¹ is a call to treat the

⁸¹ Hall, “Black Body”; Honma, “Trippin’”; Pawley, “Unequal Legacies.”

relations of racialized difference and power in LIS as extensions of, rather than separate from, the systems of racial domination that characterize society more broadly. We cannot effectively challenge structures of racial domination within the field without being part of larger conversations and movements addressing such systems in other contexts. The implication here, in short, is a move from a politics of purity to a politics of social critique, a reconceptualization of anti-racism from a practice of focusing solely on addressing and excising racially problematic dynamics from a space to a critical practice *from within* that space — a practice, indeed, that understands the value of examining, unpacking, and traversing such boundaries in the first place.

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