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Are We Still Transmitting Whiteness? A Case Study of a Southern, Rural Library's Youth Collections

MEREDITH E. WICKHAM AND MIRIAM E. SWEENEY

ABSTRACT

This study updates and extends Hand's (2012) research on the transmission of Whiteness through public library youth collections in the early 1900s. Taking Hand's study as a departure point, this case study of a southern, rural, public library asks whether and how Whiteness is still transmitted through the library's youth collections. Analysis of Rural Branch Library's (RBL) easy reader and juvenile biography collections confirms an overrepresentation of White authors and characters and storylines that privilege White racial frameworks. Analysis of RBL's collection development policies and practices reveals that color-blind selection policies, lack of weeding, and constraints in resources and staffing create a structure that fosters the transmission of Whiteness in the youth collections over time. This study contributes to understandings of library collections as sites of social power and has implications for the collection development policies and practices of similarly situated small and rural public libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Shane Hand (2012) argues that librarians in the early 1900s "fostered the transmission of a racial ideology based on white superiority, privilege, and black subservience" (34). Hand's historical case study of the New Orleans Public Library at the turn of the century is a provocative read that details the dovetail of the advent of children's librarianship with the emerging Lost Cause White supremacist ideology prevalent in the American South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hand describes the instantiation of this ideology in terms of active collection development that incorporated overtly racist literature into the library collection and

active partnerships with community groups, such as the Daughters of the Confederacy, that upheld White supremacist ideologies and donated materials with themes and representations that reinforced these ideals. These practices resulted in the “transmission of Whiteness” in children’s library collections that contributed to a distorted representation of White Americans as superior and deserving and Black Americans as inferior and subservient. Hand concludes by wondering “whether white children readers in the early 1900s ever had a chance in throwing off the prior generation’s anti-black prejudices” (59).

Hand’s analysis prompts thoughtful reflection on whether and how libraries still transmit Whiteness through their youth collections, and what forms ideologies of Whiteness take in today’s libraries. Inspired by Hand’s research, this case study explores these questions by analyzing the easy reader and juvenile biography collections and conducting a document analysis of collection development policies at a rural branch library in Mississippi that is referred to as Rural Branch Library (RBL). Further, this study updates Hand’s research by asking how the transmission of Whiteness might persist over time as older titles remain on library shelves due to constraints on resources and staffing for collection development. These constraints are compounded in small and rural libraries, which makes libraries like RBL particularly important sites for exploring the continued role of libraries in transmitting Whiteness through their collections.¹

WHITENESS IN YOUTH COLLECTIONS

Whiteness refers to racial ideologies that bolster the system of White supremacy by constructing White people and culture as superior, normative, and unmarked (Dyer 1997). In this way, Whiteness operates as the status quo and cultural benchmark against which all else is measured. Whiteness manifests in youth library collections in several ways, including the disproportionate representation of White authors and characters, storylines that center or normalize the experiences of White people, and overtly racist or stereotypical depictions of people of color. As Hand’s (2012) research demonstrates, youth collections that emerged during the public library movement of the 1900s had all these elements, which created a foundation of Whiteness in libraries that would persist (and be extended) over time. For example, Larrick’s (1965) study revealed the extreme lack of representation of African American authors and characters in children’s literature published in the United States in the 1960s. At that time, only 6.7% of the five thousand children’s books published included non-White characters, and many of the African American characters that did appear in picture books were grossly stereotyped (Larrick 1965). Today, children’s books are still overwhelming White; only 14.2% of children’s books feature non-White characters (CCBC, n.d.). Considering that roughly 37% of the

US population is non-White, these numbers reveal the disproportionate landscape of representation in children's books that persists (U.S. Census Bureau 2015a).

Library collections are sites of culture and politics that are institutionally produced and reproduced. They represent significant financial investments for a community and result in a sense of communal property that has been built over time through the accretion of thousands of decisions. In this way, collections carry the past forward and provide the informational foundation for patrons' identity, future decision-making, and discovery. Collections should be thought of as structural features of the library institution, since they transcend both individuals and time. This makes library collections resilient and hard to shift. This means that the racial ideologies present in library collections more than one hundred years ago have consequences for future iterations of the collection.

Lipsitz (2006) describes how "public policy and private prejudice work together" to create a "possessive investment in whiteness" wherein "whiteness has a cash value" (vii) that individuals can profit from through a system of economic advantages. He points to the numerous ways that Whiteness is actively invested in through the implementation of public policies (e.g., discriminatory housing loans, segregation, urban renewal projects) that channel protections, benefits, and opportunities to White people. In the same way that public policy shapes access to public resources such as financial aid or housing, so too do library collection development policies shape access to information about the world by crafting the landscape of the collection. Collections convey whose lives, experiences, and knowledge are valued based on the kinds of representations available. Collection development policies that have historically privileged Whiteness can create information resource gaps between White and minority racial groups that have long-term, compounding effects. Lipsitz discusses this in terms of the ability of Whites to amass wealth and resources over generations due to policies that ensure privileged access to education, housing, health care, and employment (Lipsitz 2006). In library terms, the transmission of Whiteness similarly sets up privileged access to cultural and informational resources for Whites while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of entitlement over these resources. In this sense, the consequences of discriminatory policies of the past become linked with discriminatory policies of the present, obscuring the systematic and longitudinal nature of oppression.

Over the past decades there have been movements within the library profession to diversify youth library collections, which reflects shifting understandings of the library collection as a site of power rather than a neutral space. The grassroots organization We Need Diverse Books (<http://weneeddiversebooks.org>) is one such example of librarians advocating for

children's books by and about marginalized communities. Although the term *diversity* is not without its problems (Honma 2005; Pawley 2006), it is used here to capture multifaceted attempts to redress social inequalities in library collections.

The American Library Association's (ALA 1990) statement on diversity in collection development, which was first adopted in 1982, gives clear guidance for any librarian analyzing a collection for racial diversity. The sections specifying that "librarians have a professional responsibility to be inclusive, not exclusive, in collection development" (para. 3) and that "not selecting materials about or by minorities because it is thought these groups or interests are not represented in a community" is prohibited and labeled as censorship (para. 2) are particularly relevant for this study. Naidoo (2014) offers an updated, and more comprehensive, statement of guidance for considering diversity in collection development:

Children's print and digital materials should represent all types of diversity, including race, ethnicity, gender expression, religious preference, family composition, ancestry, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language fluency, and citizenship status. (8–9)

Borrowing Bishop's (1997) concept of books as mirrors and windows, Naidoo emphasizes the need for children to see their own lives and cultures reflected back to them and to look into the lives and cultures of others. Diverse library collections can provide these opportunities and promote the cultural competence needed for life in a global society. This implies that even if a library is serving a small and relatively racially or ethnically homogenous community, the library has a clear mission to provide a plurality of positive racial and ethnic representations so children can learn about people and experiences outside of their own frame of reference. Norris Blackson (2015) echoes this in her research, saying "it is important not to exclude materials simply because no members of that ethnic group live in the community" (20–21). This guidance has particular bearing on libraries that serve small and rural communities that are often more demographically homogenous.

Williams and Deyoe's (2014) study assessed the diversity of youth collections in more than five thousand American libraries using curated checklists of titles with racially diverse authorship and subject matter and data on collection expenditures. The authors found "that increased collection size and increased collection expenditures were positively correlated with representations of diversity in public library youth collections" (117). These findings have significant implications for small and rural libraries, which are certain to have smaller collections and materials budgets. Indeed, RBL's collection expenditure range matches those of libraries stud-

ied for which only 2.5% of the youth collection was racially or ethnically diverse (Williams and Deyoe 2014).

Warner (2001) questions the effectiveness of “moving beyond Whiteness” in her analysis of Africana and African American studies collections materials. Warner singles out the following challenges for academic libraries developing non-White collections: (a) bibliographers “still playing catch-up, since collecting documentation of the activities of white males has hundreds of years head start” (168); (b) the relative invisibility of diverse authors and books in publishing and in bibliographic tools such as professional review journals; (c) academic purchasing procedures that prioritize mainstream publishers over independent presses, self-published titles, and materials from foreign countries; and (d) the cost, both in materials and staff time, of identifying and purchasing these titles. Although Warner’s study focuses on academic institutions, her recommendation that “libraries committed to diversifying their collections need to be willing to assign additional resources, in both staff time and money, towards reaching that goal” (169) is applicable to public libraries. This further underscores the additional barriers that resource-challenged institutions, such as small and rural libraries, are faced with reconciling.

PROFILE OF A RURAL BRANCH LIBRARY

The total service population of RBL’s library system is almost 32,000, a third of whom use RBL as their service point because it is the branch location with the longest hours (open twenty-eight hours per week) in the county. RBL serves a county population that is 61% African American, 35% White, and 3.5% Native American. Library users in rural areas encounter structural barriers to accessing RBL’s services, such as lack of a public transportation system. The distance between homes might make it difficult to carpool or catch a ride from a friend; there are 14 people per square mile living in the county. By contrast, the nearby metropolitan city of Jackson, Mississippi, has 1,563 people per square mile, which may translate to significantly more opportunities for transportation support and assistance. In addition, with almost one in three residents of RBL’s county living below the federal poverty designation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015b), barriers to library use may be financial; fines and fees, or fear of them, can keep a family from using the library.

The same structural barriers to patron access can have major impacts on library staffing, expertise, and professional development. The regional library systems that now cover large swaths of rural Mississippi often were created when small communities banded together to try to provide better library services to their residents. This rationale was at the heart of the 1969 formation of RBL’s 1,350-square-mile library system. RBL employees in the rural county branches of this library system may have to travel nearly

fifty miles to the central location for staff development days or meetings. For staff earning minimum wage and working part time, there may not be a spare, reliable vehicle available to make the drive, although RBL does reimburse staff for miles traveled.

Last, at least in part because of the low salaries these organizations are able to offer, degreed librarians are scarce in rural public libraries (Hildreth 2007). In their study of rural libraries, Real, Bertot, and Jaeger (2014) report only an average of .75 degree holders per system. At the time of this study, there were no master's degree-holding librarians in RBL. The dearth of academically trained professional library staff presents several challenges for small and rural libraries, including the need to provide more training to bring staff up to speed on basic professional skills. However, there is often not enough time or human resources available in these libraries to adequately address gaps in knowledge and skills or introduce foundational concepts that are emphasized in formal library and information studies education. This potentially creates a gap between local, institutional practices and current professional standards and guidelines for creating diverse and inclusive collections.

RBL'S YOUTH COLLECTIONS

To explore whether and how youth collections at RBL are transmitting Whiteness, we analyzed the easy reader and juvenile biography collections. We evaluated a random sample of 200 picture books from the easy reader collection for the following dimensions: (a) the publication date, (b) the author's race or ethnicity, and (c) the presence and characterization of any non-White characters in the cover art or book description. Similarly, we analyzed the following dimensions of 141 juvenile biographies: (a) the publication date, (b) the subject's race or ethnicity, and (c) the cultural frame through which historical subjects and subject matter were portrayed. Taken together, these pieces of information, though imperfect, provide a snapshot of the easy readers and juvenile biographies and give clues as to the presence and forms of ideologies of Whiteness in these collections.

This study operates with the assumption that the library system's catalog correctly entered the metadata for the books into the integrated library system (ILS). Where metadata were incomplete or incorrect (e.g., a publication date of 208) and could be supplied by a visit to the shelves or WorldCat, this was done. If the missing data could not be supplied, the item was removed from the sample and a replacement item from that collection was chosen via random number generation. The last inventory of RBL's shelves was nearly ten years ago, so it is highly probable that some titles listed in the catalog were not actually available. Unless a book was listed as missing in the ILS, checked-out books were assumed to be part of the current circulating collection. These bibliographic metadata for the books were included in the study even if we did not have physical access

to the books at the time of the study. Records from WorldCat were used to glean information about the physical book in cases where they were unavailable at RBL.

Easy Readers

The average date of publication for the entire library system is 1990. For the easy reader picture book collection at RBL, the average publication date is 1998. According to standards for South Carolina elementary school libraries, a library collection is considered to be “at risk” if the total collection has an average copyright date that is sixteen years earlier than the current date and is exemplary if the average copyright date is eleven or fewer years from the current date (South Carolina Department of Education 2016). RBL falls into the at-risk category. In addition, the most recently published accreditation standards for Texas public libraries (TLA 2014) set the 50th percentile accreditation benchmark at 20% of the collection published within the past five years and the best-practice level at 25% of the collection. Just over 5% of the titles in RBL’s easy reader collection had publication dates within the past five years at the time of this study. These statistics demonstrate that the easy reader collection already lags against standard benchmarks meant to keep collections current and refreshed.²

The race and ethnicity of the author proved quite difficult to ascertain in many cases, especially for older books. The question of representation based on a cover image or plot summary is a multifaceted one. Covers can be deceptive, and the mere presence of a diverse character on the cover or in the book blurb does not actually reveal the nature or context of how that character is portrayed in the book. For the purposes of this case study, the mere presence of a non-White character was noted as a rudimentary analysis. Where possible, the more complex issue of how non-White characters are presented and characterized is explored through individual titles in the analysis.

The books’ characters or subject matter, determined using cover photos or descriptions in the catalog, could not be identified in approximately 10% of the sample. For the remaining 162 titles, 28% (45 picture books) featured animal or nonhuman characters (e.g., dinosaurs, trucks), 67% (108 books) featured White characters, and nearly 6% (9 books) represented non-White characters. Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) numbers on the subject matter representation of diverse characters show that approximately 15% of the children’s titles published featured non-White characters (CCBC, n.d.). In 1998, the average publication date of the RBL easy reader collection, CCBC tracked its statistics differently, so it is impossible to separate authorship and subject matter, but the numbers show a combined 9% total (versus 6% of RBL’s sample) of books either by non-White authors or illustrators or about non-White characters.

A cursory look at animal and nonhuman characters in this easy reader

collection suggests further research may be needed to decide whether these characters are stand-ins for racial and ethnic identities. For instance, the Skippyjon Jones series features an anthropomorphized Siamese cat who speaks in Mock Spanish and conforms to several Latinx stereotypes (Han 2013; Slapin 2013). Nonhuman characters from dogs to fish to made-up creations often have Anglo-European features and cultural signifiers. In a 1952 edition of *Five Little Monkeys*, the monkeys, especially the mother and doctor monkeys, are anthropomorphized in ways that draw on historical racist stereotypes of African Americans, which reflects the more overtly racist origins and earlier versions of this nursery rhyme that substituted a racist slur in the title.

Stereotypes abound in *Walt Disney's Uncle Remus Stories from the Walt Disney Motion Picture "Song of the South,"* a 1947 Little Golden Book found in RBL's uncatalogued board book collection for preschool children. Overtly White supremacist ideas run throughout the story and imagery, which presents an idyllic version of plantation life rife with racist caricatures of happy and subservient Black characters pleasantly serving benevolent White landowners (Lingan 2013). However, outright stereotyping is not the only concern in terms of problematic representations. There is also *tokenism*, in which a single character is included to stand in as a representative of their race rather than being allowed to function as an individual, a privilege granted to even the most minor White characters.

In almost one third of the sampled books, the author's racial or ethnic identity could not be determined. In the remaining 139 picture books, the author was identified as non-White in only 2% of the books. Compare this to CCBC data that found only 11% of the children's books surveyed were written or illustrated by non-White authors or artists (CCBC, n.d.), and it is clear these numbers are dire. This means that White authors made up 98% of the total authorship that could be determined in the easy reader random sample. As the CCBC notes, the overrepresentation of White authors means that many books about diverse characters are being written by authors who are not members of the communities they are portraying. One example of this from RBL was found in Eve Bunting's *Smoky Night*, a Caldecott winner with a racially diverse cast of characters who experience a night during the Los Angeles riots after the police officers involved in the beating of Rodney King were acquitted. Although the story itself has racially diverse characters placed in a plot that connects to racialized themes of police violence against people of color, the action is seen from a White frame of reference and views the rioters as a separate *they* rather than as part of the neighborhood.

Last, several books featured non-White characters through a color-blind lens, which functions as an erasure of difference. Color-blind ideology emphasizes that "we are all the same," disavowing race as a structural feature that still organizes individuals' experiences and opportunities in

society (Bonilla-Silva 2010). For example, a 1979 juvenile nonfiction title about family life features an all-White family with an adopted Black child who is portrayed as identical to his siblings in all respects but skin shading in black-and-white illustrations. The portrayal of non-White characters as identical to White characters, be it phenotypically or culturally, can be damaging in that it centers the bodies and experiences of White people. Color blindness can be damaging because it posits racial and cultural differences as problems to be avoided rather than as sources of joy, pride, community, and belonging.

Juvenile Biographies

Biographies highlight the life stories and achievements of individuals deemed important or noteworthy. Therefore, inventorying which people are included in this collection reveals ideological assumptions about whose stories are seen as central and whose are seen as marginal. As with the easy readers, the vast majority of RBL's juvenile biography collection represented White people and culture. Of 141 juvenile biographies, 119 were biographies of White persons, representing just over 84% of the collection. The remaining 22 titles, or 16% of the total collection, were biographies of non-White persons. The titles are somewhat dated, and many represent pop culture from the 1990s, which is also when the library last received a large grant to purchase juvenile nonfiction. Biographies of Macaulay Culkin as a child star, the singing group Hansen, and 1980s supermodel Cindy Crawford probably do not represent the current interests of kids, and they certainly do not provide equal opportunities to learn about non-White pop stars and celebrities from the same era.

In terms of historical figures, Christopher Columbus is overrepresented in the collection, with five titles of various publication dates. All of these advance a hegemonic narrative of conquest and colonization rather than highlighting the atrocities of genocide or perspectives of indigenous peoples. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy are also overrepresented, as is inventor Thomas Edison, with four biographies each. Aviator Amelia Earhart and football player Brett Favre have three titles each.

Two Confederate generals (Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee) are represented in juvenile biographies, but not a single Union general is present in the collection. There is a sympathetic portrait of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, from 1963, but not one biography of Abraham Lincoln or any title specifically devoted to Lincoln (although there is a picture book about him in the easy reader section). Upon closer examination, the Jefferson biography repeatedly returns to a pro-states' rights dogma, which was foundational for the Lost Cause racial ideology espoused by White supremacists in the South following Reconstruction.

States' rights and a profoundly explicit White supremacist ideology

pop up again in a detailed biography entitled *Confederate Spy: Rose O'Neale Greenhow*. Although published in 1967, records show that it was among the discards of the Mississippi Library Commission that were donated to this library system in the early 1990s in an attempt to beef up collections statewide for libraries with weak collection budgets. Titles published as early as 1936 that were part of this gift were discovered during this audit. The Greenhow biography, last checked out in 2004, offers an offensive, paternalistic view of slavery in which slaves are depicted as props for noble Southern Whites who are determined to save them from evil abolitionists or as children who need benevolent Whites to oversee their fortunes and futures. These racist themes, which were prominently discussed in Hand's study, are still present on library shelves.

In terms of biographies of people of color, there are sixteen books featuring African American protagonists; several of these are different biographical accounts of the same person. Martin Luther King, Jr. and George Washington Carver have two books each. There are very few biographies of Civil Rights pioneers—nothing about John Lewis, Rosa Parks, or even Medgar Evers, who was born and denied the right to vote in the adjacent county served by RBL. Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Malcolm X make a single joint appearance in one book in the juvenile nonfiction section; it was checked out at the time of this analysis. Harriet Tubman is represented in a juvenile biography, but Mississippi Civil Rights heroine Fannie Lou Hamer is not represented anywhere. Contemporary biographies of African Americans include sports stars (e.g., Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan), musicians (e.g., Michael Jackson, Ray Charles), two writers (Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou), and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. There are no biographies of President Barack Obama. Juvenile biographies of non-White and non-American or Western European persons include one each of Nelson Mandela, Roberto Clemente, Yao Ming, and Ghandi. There is only one juvenile biography of a Native American, Crazy Horse, and there are no biographies that mention the local Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, many of whom use the library and whose lands extend into the county this library serves.

Based on these observations, we conclude that RBL is indeed transmitting Whiteness through its youth collections. Both the easy reader and juvenile biography collections comprise an overrepresentation of White authors, characters, and storylines that privilege White racial frames. Though there were perhaps fewer examples of overt racist tropes than Hand's study reported, these elements were nevertheless still present in the collection. This raises questions about how these titles are selected, how they persist, and how the shape of the collection is formed through a variety of development and management practices. The next section explores RBL's collection development policies and practices to gain more insight into these questions.

RBL'S COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

RBL, like many small and rural libraries, has a minimal collection development budget and skeletal staffing, which makes trained selection and regular, cyclical inventory and deselection challenging. This has serious implications for how and what kinds of materials are carried forward in time through library collections. To explore how Whiteness is transmitted through RBL's collection, we analyzed the materials selection policy, the current job descriptions for staff involved in selection, and other relevant training documents that mention selection processes or guidelines. This analysis pieces together RBL's formal procedures for collection development, with attention paid to ways in which these policies might enable the persistence of Whiteness in the collection over time.

Materials Selection Policy

RBL's materials selection policy is just over three pages long. The introduction to the policy explains how library selection is, by its very nature, limited and even more so with tight financial resource constraints. The bottom line statement of the first main paragraph states that "selection is based on the particular needs and interests of the community," and this is conceptually repeated throughout the document, as is the idea of a limited budget affecting selection choices. After explaining repeatedly that cost is always a factor for the library, a statement on controversial materials states: "[RBL] does not practice censorship. Materials which present all points of view will be selected wherever cost and availability are not factors." Reading the document critically and considering the "needs and interests of the community" statement alongside cost as driving factors, it is clear that a justification will always be available for *not* selecting items that represent points of views that are deemed noncentral (effectually coded as nondominant).

Only two types of materials are recognized in these documents by the system director and the board of trustees as important to the collection: "basic materials of permanent value as well as timely materials on current issues." However, all materials added to the collection, whether by donation or purchase, must meet at least two of the ten criteria listed, ranging from the book's authoritativeness and permanence to its contemporary significance and, again, its "appeal to the interests and needs of the community." Note that this language uses the definite article to group *the community* as a unified, homogenous set of interests. This framing forecloses an explicit discussion of competing or multifaceted patron interests and needs. In the absence of a pluralistic understanding of communities' variant needs and interests, an assumption may be made that the values and norms of the dominant (White) culture stand in as an invisible cultural benchmark. The analysis of the youth collections provided here certainly bears this out.

Diversity and plurality are not explicitly mentioned as goals for selection for characters, subject matter, or authorship. Quite the opposite, a clause asserts: "In no case will any item be included or excluded merely because of the race, nationality, religious or political views of the author." This wording reflects color-blind discourse, an ideology that proffers non-racial explanations for racial outcomes and rejects the continued presence of structural racism in society (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Indeed, under the rubric of color blindness, to even acknowledge race as a system that structures differential opportunities is to be deemed racist. The language of the selection policy forecloses the possibility of intervening in the collection through purposive selection practices meant to redress inequalities. Instead, the policy actively prevents the consideration of race as a criterion for selection or exclusion, though clearly the collection has been shaped by race over time. Since Whiteness operates as an unmarked category, the overwhelming Whiteness of the collection is considered neutral rather than racialized. This is harmful because it sets up the library collection as a neutral set of materials without a history and social context rather than the result of a series of practices shaped by systemic discrimination through past and present collection development practices. In this way, Whiteness continues to organize the collection as an invisible, and impenetrable, criteria for inclusion.

Acquiring Materials

Rural libraries are often underresourced compared to their nonrural counterparts, a fact that significantly impacts the library collection. In 2015, the mean per capita operating expenditure of the Public Library Data Service's continuously reporting US public libraries was \$53.40 (Reid 2016). Expenditures in all Mississippi libraries in fiscal year 2015 averaged \$16 per capita (Mississippi Library Commission, n.d.). By comparison, RBL reported a per capita expenditure of only \$7.95 for the same period. In fiscal year 2016, RBL added over 4,100 physical items to its collection at an average cost around \$1.50 per item. Given that the average cost of a hardback book in 2014 was \$33.92, it seems likely that most of the items the library added were not purchased by the library (Mississippi Library Commission 2015, 5).

A review of RBL's purchasing practices revealed that the library made use of multiple, creative approaches for acquiring collections. This included seeking out vendors that specialize in not-new library materials, such as used books on CD, and using an Amazon wish list that allowed donors who saw the requests via social media to send books directly to the library. RBL also received the Libri Grant, which provides children's books via Junior Library Guild to small and rural libraries. Other projects brought in community partners and volunteers who engaged in local book drives for donations. The library director, as part of her work on a separate

book selection committee, contributed all of the new books donated by publishers for review to the collection. An urban library in Mississippi donated weeded books in good condition to RBL, and two librarians in other states sent used DVDs and nonfiction books purchased at a thrift store.

Less than \$300 was spent on nonfiction in fiscal year 2016. The library has a long list of items that need to be replaced because they were so out of date they had to be weeded for accuracy, but funds were not available at that time to replace them. These items range from an atlas to a book on cancer treatment. In fiscal year 2016, less than \$50 of library collection development funds were spent on materials for children ages eighteen and younger, who account for more than nine thousand of the community residents that the library serves.

Much of the nonfiction collection comes from local donors, which impacts the shape of the collection. A state library consultant recently audited the reference, nonfiction, and juvenile nonfiction collections and pointed out that these collections tend to lean politically to the right, with many titles oriented toward evangelical Christianity. No doubt this is a result of relying on donations from local community groups rather than having a more robust and strategic selection process. Attempts by the new director to balance and update the adult nonfiction collection using several hundred dollars of designated collection funds resulted in a deficit of funds for the expected bestsellers that month, leading to complaints from patrons and a board member.

Selection

All selection at RBL is done by a staff member who has a high school education and has received no specific training in professional collection development best practices. There have been three selectors in the history of RBL, the first of whom began in 1969. The first two trained their own replacements upon retirement. The training guidelines suggest that the library purchase as many adult fiction bestsellers as possible when funds are available; the majority of nonfiction titles and items for the youth collections come from donations from members of the community and from grants. Apparently, as a part of a cost-saving measure in the mid-1990s, RBL let go of subscriptions to the professional review magazines that would be important tools for the selecting and purchasing process.

In a typical month, the system selector purchases twenty to twenty-five titles, an average of four per branch, with the lion's share usually going to the main library and the branch in the town with the largest population, both of which are over an hour's drive from RBL. RBL requests and receives many intra- and interlibrary loans and averages three new titles per month added to its collection. Staff regularly make purchase suggestions to the selector via fax and email when they cannot secure a patron request via interlibrary loan. A consistent request for RBL is for more Af-

rican American adult fiction, which is popular at this branch location, reflecting the demographics of the county.

Collection Turnover

Considering the financial and staffing situations of rural libraries in general, it seems likely that rural library collections would be weeded less frequently. RBL's last available weeding inventory report dates from 2007. Using historical data supplied by the Mississippi Library Commission website regarding Mississippi public libraries' weeding rates and collection expenditures and average book prices for 2016 (School Library Journal 2016), we were able to calculate the average collection refresh rates for rural and nonrural Mississippi libraries to see how RBL measured up.

Nonrural libraries in Mississippi weeded an average of 4.75% of their physical collections in 2015, equating to approximately 10,350 items. Their rural counterparts weeded 3.35% of their physical collections, or approximately 2,749 items. The average rural library system in Mississippi added approximately 2,508 titles to its collection last fiscal year, while the nonrural library system added around 9,781 titles. This information demonstrates that libraries, as a whole, are not replacing all the titles they remove. Rural libraries, on average, replace about 91% of what they weed each year. Nonrural libraries replace about 95% of what they weed. When zooming in on the poorest quartile of rural libraries, the picture is dimmer: These libraries only replace 53% of what they weed each year. Rural libraries in Mississippi spent an average of \$1.18 per capita acquiring new materials for their collections, whereas libraries in nonrural settings (metropolitan, urban, suburban) in the state spent \$1.55 per capita. In 2015, RBL's library system spent only \$0.23 per capita on collection development among five libraries, including RBL.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of RBL's collection development policies and practices reveals that color-blind selection, lack of weeding, and constraints of resources and staffing create a structure that fosters the transmission and persistence of Whiteness in the library's youth collections over time. Thus, attempts to diversify the library collection must be intentional, ongoing, and actively engaged with shifting the very institutional structures that libraries champion for their resiliency. Collection development policies and practices are key sites for intervention on the transmission of Whiteness and can potentially leverage the structural features of the library toward plurality, diversity, and inclusion.

Racial and ethnic diversity (along with other facets of diversity) must be explicitly valued in the selection policy. Color-blind language should be removed and replaced with goals for creating a collection that has racially and ethnically diverse authorship and subject matter and reflects a

plurality of perspectives and lived experiences. This needs to be further backed up with short- and long-term goals for the collection that include benchmarks for achievement and accountability. Selection strategies must be developed that clearly define selection criteria for multicultural books. Specific sources for books, magazines, and online sites that review multicultural books for content, authenticity, and authority should be included in the policy alongside the “classic” review sites that tend to privilege White authors and culture. These review sources should reflect a plurality of perspectives and will necessarily extend beyond the standard set of review journals and popular publishers into small and alternate presses that highlight the works of authors from marginalized and minority groups. Ideally, targets for diversifying the collection should be tied into the library’s strategic plan to create institutional accountability and scaffolding.

Most of the books in RBL’s youth collections were donated items, which speaks to the lack of adequate financial resources for updating the collections. The youth collections reflect the haphazard timeline of the receipt of grant funds or direct gifts of books. Given this situation, it is imperative that the selector and cataloger who review community donations receive ongoing training to ensure that books are being accepted strategically and in accordance to the selection policy goals. Federal collection development grants for public libraries available (for the time being) through the Library Services and Technologies Act (LSTA) can help supplement the paucity of funds in institutions like RBL and fill in gaps in the collection. In addition, RBL’s Amazon wish list and local book drives were highly effective at bringing in community donations, so these initiatives should be leveraged in purposive ways, such as populating wish lists with preselected titles featuring authors and stories from marginalized groups. This provides a more directed way to solicit community engagement and assistance.

Taken together, the material selection policy, selection practices, lack of purchasing funds, reliance on donations, and lack of weeding create a structure that allows materials in the collection to persist over time without adequate professional oversight and refreshing. For RBL, this has created an older collection replete with dated materials and an overrepresentation of books reflecting conservative perspectives and White authors and characters. Simply putting more diverse books on the shelves is not enough to shift the collection; deacquisition plays an important role for shifting the collection landscape through active planning, routine review, and weeding projects. Weeding helps keep the collection current and relevant and improves circulation. Weeding projects often focus on publication dates, circulation statistics, and cultural ideas about materials that are seen as central or classic. This study suggests that weeding projects must also consider facets of diversity in evaluating materials for deacquisition. Finally, overtly racist books must be removed from the collection. Allow-

ing these materials to persist on the shelves sends a direct, hostile message to patrons from marginalized groups that the library is not for them and only further entrenches harmful ideologies of Whiteness in the collection.

CONCLUSION

We present this case study as an exploration of how library collections can function as institutional structures that potentially reinforce hegemonic ideologies, in this case Whiteness and White supremacy. Our findings suggest that collection development policies and practices are key starting places for intervening in the transmission of Whiteness in library collections. This perspective highlights the complexity of collection development and necessitates moving away from individualistic, one-off solutions toward longer-term, structural interventions that touch every aspect of collection management. This study demonstrates that active intervention and intentional divestment in Whiteness are necessary to change the shape of the library collection over time. Selection, acquisition, maintenance, and deacquisition practices must be shaped in the service of equality and justice.

Though our case study presented the unique context of one library's youth collections, this research has clear implications for similarly situated small and rural libraries. RBL, like many small and rural libraries, has significant resource and staffing challenges that constrain collection development practices and create conditions that foster the transmission and entrenchment of Whiteness. Future research might explore the transmission of Whiteness in the library collections of small and rural libraries in different geographic regions, or seek a comparative analysis with larger, more resourced urban libraries. In any case, it is crucial that librarians continue to engage with their collections as sites of social power that structure opportunities for their patron communities.

NOTES

1. Small libraries are defined as libraries with legal service area populations of fewer than twenty-five thousand. They make up approximately 77% of the total public libraries in the country (Swan, Grimes, & Owens 2013). Rural libraries, defined here using the Public Library Survey's urban-centric locale code system, make up approximately 47% of total public library locations in the country (Swan, Grimes, and Owens 2013). There is substantial overlap in these two categories; nearly 43% of public libraries are both small and rural.
2. Accreditation standards for average publication date could not be located for Mississippi school or public libraries at the time of this study.

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