Review of Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory

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In the conclusion to *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory*, editors Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight write, "It is necessary to listen to Black, Indigenous, and People of color—*we* are the scholars of our own liberation" (330). This volume embodies a critical piece of that scholarship. Throughout its pages, authors define and employ critical race theory (CRT) tenets—race as a social construct, racism as normal, experiences and knowledge of BIPOC, intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, whiteness as property, critique of dominant ideologies, focus on historical contexts, counterstorytelling and voice, and interest convergence—to analyze and contextualize the relationship between race, racism, and power in our field. They note that white supremacy was built into the structures and systems of our field and continues as a destructive force to this day. They provide CRT scholar Frances Lee Ansley's definition of white supremacy as context and clarification: "a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (6). This volume is grounded in the premise that library and information studies (LIS) lacks a critical understanding of how racial power operates in the field, and that its focus on demographic diversity without this understanding is harmful to both information workers of color and the communities we serve. By employing CRT, information professionals can examine the racial dynamics at play and work to dismantle them to make our field more just.

Leung and López-McKnight begin by recounting the genesis of CRT in the legal field and how it has now moved into the social sciences and humanities. They give examples of how CRT has been valuable in examining how and why race, power, and systems of domination operate in their areas of study. They highlight the particular relevance to LIS of CRT's application in education policy, theory, and curriculum, and also note a major challenge—that of being stuck in a "problem-posing" pattern, as indicated by Marvin Lynn, editor of the *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*. Our editors write, "This will be a vital lesson to heed, as it can be an easy trap to fall into. While the first step is necessarily naming and understanding the problem, we must also develop solutions or we will be caught in an endless cycle of naming and understanding, never making progress toward measurable, concrete actions" (11). This book skillfully ushers us along without getting caught in this cycle. There are chapters that help to name and understand, as that is a necessary part, but many also offer steps to get us closer to the goal of a more just field.

Leung and López-McKnight have arranged *Knowledge Justice* into three parts: Destroy White Supremacy, Illuminate Erasure, and Radical Collective Imaginations toward Liberation. Chapters in each section, both individually and as a whole, speak to and around these themes. Scholars Todd Honma, Anthony W. Dunbar, and Tonia Sutherland each wonderfully ground the three parts with their respective introductions, providing analysis and framing for the chapters to come.

In Destroy White Supremacy, introduced by Todd Honma, authors interrogate core values of librarianship and archives and explore the ways practitioners can use CRT methodologies in order to disrupt white supremacy in LIS and the systems and practices built upon that foundation.

Anastasia Chiu, Fobazi M. Ettarh, and Jennifer A. Ferretti open this section with "Not the Shark, but the Water: How Neutrality and Vocational Awe Intertwine to Uphold White Supremacy." "Vocational awe," a term Ettarh introduced in a 2018 article, refers to ideas and values that information workers hold about the profession that result in the belief that libraries (here, the term is used expansively) as institutions are inherently good, sacred, and beyond critique. Ettarh, Chiu, and Ferretti analyze vocational awe, along with neutrality, and examine how these values are tied to the field's structural roots in white supremacy. They further challenge the field to reject these beliefs and engage in discussion and criticism in order to move toward justice.

Other chapters in this section explore the ways in which libraries and information organization methodologies contribute to the oppression of communities of color. Myrna Morales and Stacie Williams discuss epistemic supremacy and offer transformative librarianship as a solution with examples of how to create conditions for resistance. Jennifer Brown, Nicholae Cline (Coharie), and Marisa Méndez-Brady examine institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion documents and how the (unpaid) work of these institutional efforts is largely placed on the already overburdened shoulders of BIPOC employees. The authors address racialized labor inequities in information professions and dream of what "just" labor practices might look like.

In the final chapter of this section, Miranda H. Belarde-Lewis (Zuni/Tlingit) and Sarah R. Kostelecky (Zuni Pueblo) share tribal critical race theory (Tribal Crit), a part of CRT that is based upon the acknowledgement that "colonization is endemic to society." They note, "While CRT identifies racism and various systems of oppression meant to limit access to education for People of Color, it lacks a widespread acknowledgment that the entirety of Native ways of knowing—including, but certainly not limited to, our conceptions of what constitutes information and knowledge, and our specific protocols regarding the sharing of our information resources—has been specifically targeted for eradication and erasure" (114). Their chapter shares projects from their cultural institutions centering Zuni voices and knowledge and is a thrilling example of shifting the power to communities.

Introduced by Anthony W. Dunbar, the second section, Illuminate Erasure, examines approaches to information access. Chapters in this section explore via counterstory and other CRT tenets the micro- and macroaggressions BIPOC in the information field experience. In "Counterstoried Spaces and Unknowns: A Queer South Asian Librarian Dreaming," Vani Natarajan shares a personal narrative and employs queer of color critique to analyze and interpret their stories and the marginalization they experienced due to their intersecting identities, and to then strategize a means of resistance. Natarajan introduces readers to Tara Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth, but substitutes "abundance" for "capital," thereby challenging the capitalist scarcity mindset and embracing community and abundance.

In their chapters, both Shaundra Walker and Sujei Lugo Vázquez delve into the stories of BIPOC activist-librarians. Walker discusses Ann Allen Shockley and her advocacy for special collections serving historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Vázquez explores children's librarianship through the stories of Augusta Braxston Baker, Pura T. Belpré, Charlemae Hill Rollins, Effie Lee Morris, and Lotsee Patterson. Both authors highlight how the historical context of systemic racism in which their subjects worked contributed to the erasure of BIPOC stories and knowledge. Their chapters tell stories and offer visions to, as Vázquez writes, "reimagine the past."

This section closes with Harrison W. Inefuku's examination of the interaction between LIS, academia, and academic publishing, and how racism inherent in the systems we rely on within these fields affects hiring, retention, and promotion. Inefuku discusses the ways in which the systemic racism present in our field's methods of classification and dissemination of knowledge has rippling effects for BIPOC librarians and scholars. For example, he notes that there is currently no Library of Congress Subject Heading for Critical Race Theory, prompting the editors to question in the conclusion "How will this book be classified by Library of Congress catalogers when the main heading it should be under does not even exist?" (322).

Tonia Sutherland introduces the final section, Radical Collective Imaginations toward Liberation, in which authors incorporate contemplations of white supremacy and information systems to examine how communities and care are integral to social justice work. In "Dewhitening Librarianship: A Policy Proposal for Libraries," Isabel Espinal, April M. Hathcock, and Maria Rios examine the historical and racial contexts of the "pipeline problem." Their chapter offers a thorough and actionable proposal for bringing more BIPOC into the library and archives professions via postbaccalaureate fellowships that would financially support new LIS students of color, thereby removing one of the largest barriers to entry into the field. This proposal decenters whiteness and looks to new methods that bring people in. Similarly, Torie Quiñonez, Lalitha Nataraj, and Antonia Olivas's "The Praxis of Relation, Validation, and Motivation: Articulating LIS Collegiality through a CRT Lens" discusses mentorship, community building, and how embracing validation theory and cultural community wealth can benefit students and librarians in an academic community. When examined together, the section title's goal of "radical collective imaginations toward liberation" comes into focus.

Anne Cong-Huyen and Kush Patel's "Precarious Labor and Radical Care in Libraries and Digital Humanities" also looks to community as it discusses the overwhelming prevalence and, in fact, dependence on, precarious jobs for emerging professionals. In sharing their own experiences, Cong-Huyen and Patel encourage readers to consider how adopting radical care into approaches to librarianship and digital humanities can oppose these marginalizing practices. This chapter captures "the paradoxes of doing and *being* diversity in digital humanities and libraries" (266) incredibly well and links that to precarious labor, but radical care is the throughline of this piece.

Rachel E. Winston's chapter introduces to archival and LIS scholarship critical race praxis (CRP), which is action-oriented and works to move the theoretical toward practical action. Winston explains the tenets of CRP—Disruptive, Responsive, Actionable, Informed, and Caring—and how their adoption could engage with those previously marginalized and lift them up to lead. She weaves together narrative, analysis, and action plan, and invites additional conversation to move the work forward.

Closing out this section is Kafi Kumasi's "'Getting InFLOmation': A Critical Race Theory Tale from the School Library," which embodies CRT's storytelling ethos while also providing breakdowns of concepts like whiteness as property and interest convergence through the protagonist's eyes. As readers, we see the shadows of poorly planned diversity and inclusion initiatives, and the narrative gains further depth and texture from the varied formats in which

Jamar, the protagonist, presents his experiential knowledge. If parts of it read as little too on the nose for fiction, they ring clear and true as social critique and exemplars of CRT.

It is striking to read the conclusion to *Knowledge Justice* and realize that it was written in August 2019. The writing feels somehow even more current, more needed. Leung and López-McKnight are clear from the jump that this book serves as a space for BIPOC information professionals—by BIPOC information workers, for BIPOC information workers—but it is a valuable contribution of scholarship to our field and should be read widely. Their shared scholarship and proposals work toward a common need and goal to move the profession forward and away from the faulty foundations upon which it was built—to challenge the ingrained dynamics between race and power and embrace community and radical care. Chapters included in the volume offer theory and analysis, as well as action items and suggestions for how we can progress toward achieving the goals proclaimed by the titles of each section. Working information professionals may find validation in seeing some of their own experiences reflected in the narratives, and students may find value in bringing a CRT lens to their studies. Regardless of career trajectory, *Knowledge Justice* encourages careful and critical thought and presents us with opportunities to have conversations and take actions to make our field more just.