Decentering Whiteness in Design History Resources

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Decentering Whiteness in Design History Resources came online in June 2020 with the timely (if not overdue) and essential mission to "help instructors of design history decenter whiteness in their classes." As a living, evolving bibliography on the Google Docs platform, the resource is both freely available and freely editable. The project welcomes bibliographic entries, edits, and comments from anyone interested in sharing resources that they have found useful in teaching and studying the intersections of race and ethnicity with global design history. By inviting collaboration in this way, the resource itself strives to decenter whiteness by disrupting authorship norms and subverting the pseudo-permanency of publication.

Originally created by a self-described "group of white, US-based design history instructors...in response to their students' demands for design history courses that accurately represent the contributions of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other designers and scholars of color on their syllabuses," the authors quickly broadened their call for participation to include colleagues of color to join as editors and contributors. They cite several projects as forerunners and sources of inspiration for Decentering Whiteness, including AIGA DEC's Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion Resources Archive, Ramón Tejada's collaborative project The decolonizing, or puncturing, or de-Westernizing design Reader V4, Kimberly Jenkins's The Fashion and Race Database, and Rikki Byrd's The Fashion and Race Syllabus.

Although Decentering Whiteness does not appear to have been designed with a librarian audience in mind, its clearly organized structure and applicability to a broad array of topics within design history allow it to be of slightly greater utility to librarians than these

distinguished projects. During a time when it is increasingly imperative that our collections reflect a broader and more inclusive definition of design history, librarians who seek to support and promote the work of allied professionals of color will turn to Decentering Whiteness as a resource for assisting students and faculty, for collection development, or for their own research.

How might they begin? As a 136-page Google Doc that includes books, scholarly and popular articles, websites, and other multimedia resources, Decentering Whiteness may first impress users as unwieldy. To make it more approachable, one may pop open the document outline for use as a table of contents-slash-navigation tool. It will also be useful to orient oneself by reviewing "Our goals for the bibliography," which frames the mission of the project and provides clarity on the scope, arrangement, and searchability of the entries. This section provides key information about the thematic, rather than stylistic or chronological, organization of the entries. Thematic groupings such as "The Global Textile, Colorant, and Garment Trade" and "New Women Around the World" -- though initially disorienting to this user -- align format with mission, decentering whiteness by removing the limitations imposed by canonical Western styles and movements.

In addition to using the document outline to navigate between sections, users are instructed to employ a series of hashtags in searching for entries specific to their interests. Again, the authors intentionally decenter whiteness by avoiding hashtags for Western style names and movements. The suggested hashtags, though comprehensive, are not dynamic. Unlike their use on sites such as Twitter and Instagram, they may not be used to jump to all like tagged entries. Rather, one may successfully search the document the old-fashioned way: using Command+F/Ctrl+F.

Once readers have equipped themselves with an understanding of the organization of the document and search strategies for navigating it, they should prepare themselves to enter a deep and engaging rabbit hole. The entries are grouped according to the aforementioned themes. Each entry represents a full bibliographic citation that is dressed with a series of hashtags that identify the dates/eras, regions/nations, identities, and categories of design relevant to the resource. Each entry also includes a tag that identifies the contributor, and most (but not all) entries provide a brief and useful description of the resource, sometimes including commentary on student response to the work.

Decentering Whiteness is intended to be a crowdsourced work in perpetual progress, and that is precisely what makes it such a fun and relevant resource. Readers may find themselves wondering why an entry is classified the way it is. They may be surprised at the resources that fall under, for example, the category "Color Theory" (does anyone remember Color Me Beautiful from 1981?). Or they may want to sign up as contributors in order to submit personal

favorites they notice are missing. It is a resource that invites constant review and instigates the impulse to contribute.