

# CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN LIS

# ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP

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ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP VOLUME 56

# CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN LIS: CHALLENGING WHITE SUPREMACY IN LIBRARIES

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## SERIES EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to take this opportunity and introduce myself as the Series Editor of *Advances in Librarianship* since January 2021. In this capacity, I am extending the series' impact via integrating a critical perspective that spotlights social justice and inclusive praxis from the shadows to become an emerging canon at the very core of who we are and what we value as legit in library and information science (LIS) scholarship and practice. This strategic vision requires destabilizing of entrenched hegemonies within our privileged ranks and external communities to alleviate intersecting political, economic, social, and cultural anxieties and power imbalances we witness today. As we move toward the quarter-century mark, we also need to effectively document such paradigmatic shifts in LIS, serving as a foundation of inspiration upon which, together in our multiple identities and diversities, we can proudly contribute to the building of a meaningful society toward a brighter future for our children to inherit.

New stimulating models reimagining (or extending) the roles for cultural memory institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, archives, schools, etc.) and the field of information are much required to develop symbolic and real infrastructures for moving us forward. We also need to better tell our stories of information activism and community mobilization in the face of overwhelming challenges to human existence, from forces of neoliberal corporatization, political ransacking, media irresponsibility, climate change, environmental degradation, and pandemic dis/misinformation, to name a few. What do the contemporary threats of human extinction and cultural decay mean for LIS professionals, be it scholars, researchers, educators, practitioners, students, and others embedded in a variety of information settings? For one, it requires actions in the "doing" of resistance via information to decenter dysfunctional powerbrokers and their oppressions and entitled privileges. Further, disseminating a forward-thinking agenda and narrative beyond our internally focused bastardized institutional bastions is equally important, as we adopt an active stance to promote fairness, justice, equity/equality, change agency, empowerment, community building, and community development.

*Advances in Librarianship* holds a special place in the hands, hearts, and minds of readers as a key platform to support creative ideas and practices that change and better articulate the vital contributions of libraries and the impact of information on diverse multicultural communities in a global network information society. Moving forward, my aim for the series is to engage our diverse professional communities in critical discourse that enables real transformations to occur. It is important to propel progress in shifting entrenched positionalities in LIS, while making visible content related to the "margins." Decentering canons and practices toward equity of representation, inclusivity, and progressive change will naturally occur. Intersecting social, cultural, political, and economic

upheavals in recent times demand an urgent response from the LIS professions in this regard.

I am truly honored and privileged to build on the legacy of Paul T. Jaeger, who served as Series Editor of *Advances in Librarianship* since 2013. His research helped to mobilize LIS in addressing concerns surrounding equity, diversity, and inclusion more substantially beyond past lip service, also shaping the focus of the book series. I plan to operationalize new directions for single or multi-authored book-length explorations and edited collections by shifting focus on understudied spaces, invisible populations from the margins, and knowledge domains that have been under-researched or under-published in LIS and beyond. Examples of works might involve a critical assessment and evaluation of a reflective journey that established, or newly emerging LIS scholars, researchers, practitioners, and students undertake to propose solutions or actions in changing entrenched practices and systemic imbalanced inequities in different library and information-related settings. It might also involve decolonizing LIS publication industries in their biased Euro/Anglo-centricities with the inclusion of content from geographical diversities around the world.

I am reaching out to our multiple audiences for their support toward these goals in spreading the word for proposals to new volumes in the series. Let us find our “collective voice” in the LIS professions to make us all uncomfortable as we continue to “push the buttons,” thereby, becoming stronger in our quest to further social justice and develop our humanity, human dignity, respect, and potential to the fullest.

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**Kellee E. Warren** is Associate Professor and Special Collections Librarian at the University of Illinois Chicago. Her most recent article, "Jean Blackwell Hutson: Black Women's Leadership in Librarianship and Archives," a biographical analysis, was published in the May 2022 special issue of *Libraries: Culture, History, and Society*, 6(1). Her article on an approach to archival instruction with colonial collections, "Reimagining Special Collections Instruction: A Special Case of Haiti" was published in *The American Archivist*, fall/winter 2020 edition. Her research interests include critical pedagogies, digital humanities, and oral history (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6602-3446>).

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE VOLUME: CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

Mónica Colón-Aguirre

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Critical race theory (CRT) has become one of the most divisive terms in the last few decades. The concept, which originated in the legal studies field, has been co-opted and weaponized by political interest groups and politicians alike as a fear mongering tool and used to spread misinformation and disinformation about the goals of social justice. Various groups and individuals, including news media outlets and politicians, have attacked the concept and have spread false information about it having Marxist origins, or being a strategy for shaping K-12 curriculum, and even misrepresented as defending racist principles (Colón-Aguirre & Cooke, 2022; Parrish, 2021; Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Due to this concerted smear campaign which has taken hold of popular media, any work rooted in the principles of CRT must begin with a definition. For the purposes of this volume, it is understood that CRT is

[...] an intellectual framework aimed at explaining the real situations that affect the lives of members of minoritized groups and helps bring about revised social and systemic structures which can ameliorate the detrimental effects of racism and racist systems for these groups. (Colón-Aguirre & Cooke, 2022, p. 58)

CRT serves as the foundation for the chapters contained in this volume. The volume is organized into four sections, each with CRT as the overarching theme. These include *CRT and Navigating the White Spaces of Academia*, *CRT as a Bridge to Practice*, *Combatting Erasure with CRT*, and *CRT Beyond Libraries*.

The academic environment serves as a backdrop for many of the contributions presented here. In the first chapter under the section *CRT and Navigating*

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Critical Race Theory in LIS: Challenging White Supremacy in Libraries

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*the White Spaces of Academia*, Jaime Ding employs an autoethnographic research approach to the exploration of the topic of self-surveillance in an academic library scenario. The themes of whiteness in academia and the academic culture are expanded upon in this work by employing the CRT principle of the everyday nature of racism. While Ding's work focuses on self-surveillance, Alejandra S. Méndez Irizarry uses a CRT approach to her exploration of the roadblocks faced by Latinx librarians working in the United States. Through her personal narrative, Méndez Irizarry explores her experience working as a librarian in a community college and how aspects of race and ethnicity contribute to an environment of tokenism and isolation which can lead to burnout.

Higher education also serves as a backdrop for Tessa R. Campbell's exploration of the experiences of Native Americans in academia. She employs the principles of TribalCrit in a personal narrative with the goal of highlighting the importance of broadening the inclusion of Native Americans into library and academic spaces. The realm of higher education is also explored from the point of view of curricular design in online environments. For their contribution to this volume, Marcia Rapchak, Tinukwa Boulder, Rae Mancilla, and Tasha M. Brown use CRT as a lens to explore the perpetuation of exclusionary practices in online learning environments. Their work looks at the intersection of instructional design and librarianship with special emphasis on the implications of adopting instructional design practices in library instruction necessitated by the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

For their contribution to this volume, Dr LaTasha Velez, Tori Hopper, and Deborah Yun Caldwell deploy CRT's principles in their autoethnographic study of the creation and implementation of the student-led Critical Librarianship Reading Group (CLRG). Their work details the process of creating the CLRG as a space for open discussions of uncomfortable topics. These topics include racism, privilege, fragility, microaggressions, and intersectionality.

In addition to the academic environment, the implications, applications, and possible contributions to broader ideations of race and racism are applied to library and information science (LIS) and especially the day-to-day work in libraries. That is the theme of the chapters united under the second section *CRT as a Bridge to Practice*. Here, Cearra N. Harris details the creation of a toolkit aimed at various publics with the goal of deepening each group's understanding of CRT to help combat misinformation surrounding the term. The proposed toolkit was created to serve as a mechanism to bridge the gap between academic approaches to CRT, such as LIS education, and the tools needed by LIS practitioners.

For her part, Dr Aisha M. Johnson's contribution to this volume is an exploration of the effects of systemic racism in libraries and its effects on intellectual freedom. Her work focuses on how southern states, through the deployment of Jim Crow laws, created exclusionary services in libraries and how these evolved into exclusionary policies and the effects of these in current library environments. CRT here serves as a framework and as a foundational principle to InfoCrit; an approach to provide a critical analysis of intellectual freedom in libraries. LIS practice is also present in Julia Burns Petrella's work. Her chapter deploys CRT as a framework in the exploration of the role racism plays in the LIS discipline's

focus on neutrality. The exploration also delves into the idea of vocational awe and how it is influenced by whiteness and racism. In this work, the process of accreditation standards is considered as a vehicle for the exploration of these topics.

In “Check Yo’self Before You Wreck Yo’self: Diversity Residents’ Experiences Expanding CRT and Antiracism Practices in Collection Development” Mallary Rawls and Amanda M. Leftwich move the focus of practice to that of collection development policies. Their work uses CRT as a tool for exploration of the collaborative relationships between libraries aimed at providing strategies for creating inclusive collection development policies as public living documents. Their goal is to present these policies as best practices for supporting inclusivity on a larger scale for widespread policy change. The representations of practice in this volume continue with Kellee E. Warren’s contribution, which presents a case for CRT’s further incorporation in the LIS field. In her essay, Warren provides a review of the most current literature on the use of CRT aimed at examining both the library and archival professions.

The contributions to this volume don’t stop at interrogating practices in the field, but also delve into ways to avoid erasure of BIPOCs in the field. In the first chapter under the section *Combating Erasure with CRT*, Teneka Williams provides her point of view as a former LIS professional in their chapter “The Black Tax: The Impact of Race, Recognition, and Representation in Librarianship.” Williams provides an argument for how whiteness suppresses the recognition and representation of Black Americans in every field, including library science. This exploration centers on the author’s efforts to counteract the erasure of the accomplishments of LeRoy Childs, the first black Library Director of a Regional System in Georgia.

The erasure of BIPOCs contributions to knowledge is explored in this volume beyond the realm of public service and leadership. Here, Jose C. Guerrero uses CRT as a framework for his exploration of metadata as knowledge. Guerrero interrogates this notion in the context of racial domination and white ignorance and argues that metadata is ignorance due to the constant reproduction of racialized ideals. Annisija W. Hunter’s work also focuses on cataloging and knowledge organization. In “Bias in the System: A Case for Catalogers’ Judgment” she explores how cataloguers have started questioning existing cataloging schema and systems to uncover and acknowledge their biased nature. The work presents how this recognition, in turn, has opened the door for approaches to cataloging which incorporate CRT principles such as counter-storytelling and intersectionality.

In the last section of this volume, *CRT Beyond Libraries*, CRT is applied as a tool to understand social contexts and phenomena which move beyond the direct implications for libraries. In Shannon Crooks’ work “A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing: Book Banning Practices Disguised as Parental Rights Advocacy” she uses CRT as a lens to explore the most recent rash of book banning and censorship, especially in the realm of children’s and young adult’s (YA) literature. The focus of this work is how racist ideas are currently being disguised as parental rights advocacy by various groups. Similarly, Mandi Lyn Harris’ work focuses on the analysis of legislated book bans employing TribalCrit and the Doctrine of Discovery.

This approach helps elucidate the connections between colonialist ideals and censorship, particularly in the ways in which they affect the lives of Native American populations.

The broader applications of CRT into the social world are further expanded here in the realm of health services. In her chapter, Andrea M. Hayes employs CRT in their exploration of implicit bias in healthcare. She explores the origins of implicit bias and its repercussions for people of color in the realm of healthcare, as well as provides guidance for LIS professionals to work on this pressing issue.

These chapters present various points of view which hinge on the application of CRT principles to the study and reconsideration of the experiences of various publics. From LIS professionals to citizens, the implications of racism in our systems are undeniable. It is through the application of a CRT framework that the issues become clearer. This clarity is a first step to combating racism on multiple levels, and moving on to a society which is fair to all.

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## SECTION 1

# CRT AND NAVIGATING THE WHITE SPACES OF ACADEMIA

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# CHAPTER 1

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF (WHITE) CHOICES

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### ABSTRACT

*It has been said that “The most effective regulatory power is self-surveillance” (Davidson & Reddy, 2001), and such is true for many in academic libraries. This autoethnography explores this idea of self-surveillance through white supremacy culture and the history of academic libraries. Utilizing critical race theory, this chapter will describe the context and content for a series of six workshops titled “Cultural Competencies of Tisch Library.” In these workshops, using the history of our own library, I explored with my colleagues how whiteness maintains power in the choices of librarians’ past. Together, we ask, in function, in creation, in culture (in the library and outside it), and within wider systems, what is a library? In each workshop, a particular primary source, such as the 1863 First Annual Report, 1930 Carnegie Standards of Library, and staff newsletters, were paired with a particular white supremacy characteristic. Through immersive conversation, we explored the choices of white men and women in our library’s history, the lines blurred between personal choice and institutional limitations. My reflections on this experience question both the histories and the present academic library cultures.*

**Keywords:** White supremacy; critical race theory; history of academic libraries; librarianship; racism or white supremacy characteristics

## INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF HISTORY OF (WHITE) CHOICES

Like many before and after me, I was once again, doing too much. I had taken on too much, given more of me to work than I wanted. This autoethnography, though written with disappointment, is not a form of condemnation or individual critique, or even a hope for dissuading any kind of neoliberal individual accomplishments; rather, it aims to be a discussion of how whiteness is pervasive, even in the action of trying to reveal or fight against it. This is a discussion of one of the critical race theory (CRT) tenets: racism is normal (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Through it, I hope to share my account of how both the histories and the experience of white supremacy culture are deeply affecting academic libraries as an institution and the workers within the libraries, by normalizing and upholding whiteness as a cultural and socio-political systemic power. Through the description of a specific workshop series called the “Cultural Competencies of Tisch Library,” I argue that our individual and collective choices working within these structures of oppression should not only simply be acknowledged but be understood as choices so that other choices – and hence, action – can be made.

“The most effective regulatory power is self-surveillance,” and such is true for many workers in academic libraries (Davidson & Reddy, 2016, pp. 138). Though practitioners could certainly tick off many of the practices that have normalized self-surveillance in the profession, historical inquiry may be helpful to point out the choices of such normalization that persist in the present. Understanding our histories can shape what it means to understand whiteness in our four-year academic libraries, especially in how it shapes isolation and forms mazes to avoid accountability for library workers. Understanding our histories of normalized racism can show how what seemingly has always been done, such as ordinary procedures, holds up white supremacy.

In this piece, though I’m focusing on one library and academic institution, I am specifically interested in discussing the institutions that are private four-year colleges and universities, the higher education institutions that are most often associated with ideas of legacy and elitism by mainstream discourse. These wealthy institutions may be assumed to be embedded within whiteness, as the people in the past who have been most visible have largely been white, but what that whiteness entails besides individual racial identity is an important aspect to consider and continue to consider. Indeed, such institutions may seem to be neutral, just places to learn and further careers. However, these institutions are inherently political and hold power; they are structures that uphold and sustain whiteness and white supremacy. CRT, originally a legal theory, holds as one of its tenets the normality of racism. Simply reciting such a tenet is not enough: a closer look at how white supremacy has shaped a culture, has created power structures, and has maintained structural racism in the United States is needed to translate such a tenet into tangible anti-racist practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Using white supremacy culture characteristics, influenced by many, including Kenneth Jackson Jones, and largely authored by Tema Okun, a closer look at what the “traditions” have been will reveal choices that align with such characteristics, and show the CRT tenets of how racism is normal (Okun, 2020). Characteristics,