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Pre-print: Introduction (Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science)

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Introduction

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> Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.
>
> – Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said reveals the ways in which cartography is intimately linked to power. He writes: "Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space of the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control."[1] It might seem odd, then—or even inappropriate—that a collection which seeks to locate and problematize how whiteness operates in library and information sciences and studies (LIS) would take up mapping as its project. Yet, in the epigraph that opens this introduction, Said also makes the important point that we are all bound up in the struggle over geography, and we know that struggle can be productive. In taking an account of

1. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 225.

that which is often denied, in tracing that which seeks imperceptibility, in insisting that whiteness exists and that it is oppressive, we can also understand mapping as an act of resistance.

This collection does not attempt to provide a complete accounting of whiteness (not least because of spatial constraints), but rather extends to readers a topography, a mere outline or survey of the ways whiteness works on, in, and through our field. As Todd Honma notes in the foreword, whiteness is multidimensional. There are undoubtedly subfields and contexts, theoretical orientations, and pressing problems—buttes and mesas, gulches and valleys, regions and even entire continents—that one will not find covered in this anthology. In providing a lay of the land, it is my hope that readers will leave with a few tools with which to traverse yet unexplored terrains of whiteness that mark LIS.

The struggle over geography that Said describes as complex and interesting is also generative in that it creates space for what he calls imaginings. Contributors to this collection present us with their own imaginings of what it means and looks like to trouble whiteness in LIS, and they also guide us in teasing apart the way we talk about and understand it. These namings of whiteness unearth more fundamental questions about how we define whiteness to begin with. Such questions are not unique to LIS. Even a cursory review of the literature reveals a dozen or more definitions: an identity or self-understanding, an ideology or set of group beliefs, a concept, a form of property, an experience, a number of social practices, a system of power, that which terrorizes—to name but a few. It appears that whiteness, in its ubiquity and with its claims to normalcy, resists definition, consequently rendering it a particularly tricky thing to theorize. The tensions created by problems of definition, too, are beginning to mark discussions within LIS, and this book seeks to insert itself into these conversations. It aims to surface rather than resolve such tensions, ultimately giving us additional tools to identify and fissure whiteness, however defined. Further, readers will find that a number of contributors speak to the relationships between whiteness and gender, neoliberalism, and more, in addition to the relationship of whiteness to broader goals of diversity and social justice.

Yet the value of this collection lies in its explicit address of whiteness and its avoidance of some of the ways in which common understandings and utilizations of diversity and social justice can divest of race.

This collection is interdisciplinary, with many contributors drawing on a variety of sources outside LIS in their navigation of questions of whiteness. This outward orientation is largely born out of necessity, for those in other fields and disciplines have wrestled with such questions for longer and in more sustained ways. However, while this is the first book-length treatment of whiteness in LIS, a number of scholars have—over approximately the last fifteen years—paved the way for interrogations of whiteness in our field, and we too have seen a recent increase in scholarship from an emerging set of thinkers who have sought to continue this work.[2] I can speak with confidence for the

2 Earlier writings include, for example: Deborah A. Curry, "Your Worries Ain't Like Mine: African American Librarians and the Pervasiveness of Racism, Prejudice and Discrimination in Academe," *Reference Librarian* 21, no. 45-46 (1994): 299-311, doi: 10.1300/J120v21n45_26; Isabel Espinal, "A New Vocabulary for Inclusive Librarianship: Applying Whiteness Theory to our Profession," in *The Power of Language/El Poder de la Palabra: Selected Papers from the Second REFORMA National Conference*, ed. Lillian Castillo-Speed (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2001), 131-49; Jody Nyasha Warner, "Moving Beyond Whiteness in North American Academic Libraries," *Libri* 51, no. 3 (2001): 167-72, doi: 10.1515/LIBR.2001.167; John D. Berry, "White Privilege in Library Land," *Library Journal,* June 15, 2004, http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2004/06/ljarchives/backtalk-white-privilege-in-library-land/#_; 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): 1-26, http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4nj0w1mp; and Christine Pawley, "Unequal Legacies: Race and Multiculturalism in the LIS Curriculum," *Library Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2006): 149-68, doi: 10.1086/506955.

For more recent scholarship, see, for example: Lisa Hussey, "The Diversity Discussion: What are We Saying?" *Progressive Librarian*, no. 34-35 (Fall-Winter 2010): 3-10, http://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL_Jnl/pdf/PL34_35_fallwinter2010.pdf; Shane Hand, "Transmitting Whiteness: Librarians, Children, and Race, 1900-1930s," *Progressive Librarian*, no. 38-39 (Spring 2012):34-63, http://progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL_Jnl/pdf/PL38_39.pdf; nina de jesus, "Locating the Library in Institutional Oppression," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (September 2014), http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/locating-the-library-in-institutional-oppression/; Angela Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness in Librarianship," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (June 2015), http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship/; April Hathcock, "White Librarianship in

contributors to this anthology when I state that we are eternally grateful for the work these scholars have done, for their own mappings and for the paths they have cleared for us. A number have contributed in one way or another to this collection, and I am honored to include them alongside the work of emerging scholars, practitioners, and activists.

This collection is organized into three parts. Part one, "Early Formations: Tracing the Historical Operations of Whiteness," consists of contributions that do just that. Shaundra Walker dissects white philanthropic motivation and asks readers to consider the ways in which Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) navigated racist incentives to ensure they were able to provide libraries for their students. Nicole M. Joseph, Katherine M. Crowe, and Janiece Mackey interrogate how privilege and exclusion have worked upon the historical record at both HBCUs and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and offer recommendations for building anti-racist and inclusive archives. Ian Beilin explores architecture and space, using Columbia University's Butler Library as a case study to prompt us to consider how whiteness has quite literally shaped the academic research library.

In part two, "Present Topographies: Surveying Whiteness in Contemporary LIS," Sarah Hannah Gómez calls upon windows and mirrors to reflect upon a lifetime of library use, as well as her current work as

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Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (October 2015), http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/; Mario H. Ramirez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *American Archivist* 78, no. 2 (2015): 339-56, doi: 10.17723/0360-9081.78.2.339; Freeda Brook, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazzaro, "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library," *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (2015): 246-84, doi: 10.1353/lib.2015.0048; Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, "The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library," *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 667-86, doi: 10.1353/lib.2016.0015; David James Hudson, "On 'Diversity' as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017). This is not a complete list and, by the time this anthology will have been published, there will likely be more. Additionally, there are a number of blogs and other Web resources that also address whiteness in LIS (for example, *Reading While White: Allies for Racial Diversity and Inclusion in Books for Children and Teens*, last accessed January 5, 2017, http://readingwhilewhite.blogspot.com).

a black woman in a white-dominated profession. Jessica Macias details the lived experiences of library professionals as they navigate white beauty and grooming standards, calling attention to the ways in which the bodies of people of color are policed in library spaces. Vani Natarajan explores designer Orla Kiely's fashion show, *Library for Fall 2015*, to interrogate the ways in which sartorial representations of the library and library workers reflect fantasies and imperatives rooted in white femininity, and Megan Watson outlines how white feminism regulates power, influence, and decision making in academic libraries. Rafia Mirza and Maura Seale also look at intersections of gender and whiteness, and using the Center for the Future of Libraries' Trend Library as a case study, trouble the ways in which white masculinity infuses and is centered in discourse surrounding library futurity. David James Hudson rounds out this section with a critique of the discourse of practicality that dominates LIS, exposing the work a practice-oriented imperative does to preclude theoretical engagement with the complexities of white supremacy.

Part three, "Fissures: Imagining New Cartographies," begins with an account of how whiteness can be addressed in the LIS classroom; Katrina Spencer, Jennifer Margolis Jacobs, Cass Mabbott, Chloe Collins, and Rebekah M. Loyd reflect on their learning experiences with educator Nicole A. Cooke. April M. Hathcock and Stephanie Sendaula examine whiteness at the reference desk and propose ways that both librarians of color and white librarians can combat its harmful effects through bystander intervention, micro-affirmations, and a renewed focus on the recruitment and retention of librarians of color. Jorge Ricardo López-McKnight shares his experiences as a librarian of color at two PWIs, demonstrating how counterstories can be tools to deconstruct and disrupt whiteness. Natalie Baur, Margarita Vargas-Betancourt, and George Apodaca also provide an example of how whiteness can be challenged in LIS, as they tell us about the *Desmantelando Fronteras/Breaking Down Borders* collaborative webinar series that carves out a space to counter the histories of uneven relations between US and Latin American library and archival organizations. Finally, Melissa Kalpin Prescott, Kristyn

Caragher, and Katie Dover-Taylor reflect on ways white librarians can engage in anti-racist praxis at different levels and in various communities.

Readers will notice that authors' decisions regarding the capitalization of white(ness), black(ness), and the like have been respected. While such a move does not lend itself to consistency from chapter to chapter, it is important that contributors' choices—no doubt made with great thought and attention to the ways in which writing conventions can reinforce or challenge whiteness—be honored. Many thanks to those involved with Litwin Books and Library Juice Press's Series on Critical Race Studies and Multiculturalism in LIS for their willingness to support this nontraditional editorial approach.

Critical Whiteness Studies: A Very Brief Introduction

There are a number of misgivings I had going into editing this collection, and this is due in no small part to the fact that the ways in which I move about the world are at times at odds with or even contradictory to the anti-racist ideals I profess. For example, after leaving a position as an English teacher in Ukraine with the Peace Corps, I worked for two years as one of many young teachers who comprised an almost exclusively white teaching staff at a charter school in a low-income urban neighborhood (read: a community of color). In both capacities, I could be understood to be functioning under the logic of white feminine benevolence I later critique,[3] and one might bring a similar reading to my work today as a white librarian and educator at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.[4] How does one make sense of or account for their complicity in structures of imperialism, capitalism, and white supremacy, for example, while at the same time engage in the political act of critiquing

3. Schlesselman-Tarango, "The Legacy of Lady Bountiful."

4. Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), "Hispanic-Serving Institution Definitions," last accessed January 6, 2017, http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HSI_Definition1.asp. According to HACU, "Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined in Title V of the Higher Education Act as not-for-profit institutions of higher learning with a full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate student enrollment that is at least 25 percent Hispanic."

them? As Honma compels us to ask, "how do we challenge the weight of history that continues to haunt our everyday practices?"[5]

The above questions gesture to the messiness that accompanies any sort of critique. In the following sections, I expand upon and elucidate this messiness as it pertains specifically to whiteness critique by detailing some (though certainly not all) of the debates surrounding critical whiteness studies. Doing so allows me to preface one's reading of this collection with a bit of context, for problematizing whiteness is one thing, but the *act* of studying whiteness is a political project that poses a different, yet related, set of complications and challenges. If our field continues to interrogate whiteness, an understanding of the problems inherent to and the implications of this act, as well as strategies for negotiating the limitations of this broader theoretical project, are required. While not all scholarship that has engaged with whiteness has done so explicitly through the lens of critical whiteness studies (nor, you will find, do most contributors to this collection), this paradigm is a useful site of analysis because it is an established area of inquiry whose concerns align with those more recently taken up in LIS (white privilege, white supremacy, white spaces, etc.). Secondly, criticisms of critical whiteness studies are heavily documented, and it would behoove us to call upon such critiques to inform our own research agenda.

The emergence of what is known today as critical whiteness studies (sometimes referred to simply as *whiteness studies*) is often traced back to Peggy McIntosh's 1988 paper on white privilege.[6] Toni Morrison's 1992 text, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, is equally important to the birth of the framework.[7] This text explores whiteness as determined by blackness in American literature, bringing attention to the fact that while blackness is assigned meaning, "whiteness, alone,

5. Foreword, this volume.

6. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Independent School* 49, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 31-35, http://www.wvu.edu/~lawfac/jscully/Race/documents/whiteprivilege.pdf.

7. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable."[8] This insight—that whiteness is somehow veiled – is considered a key contribution to race studies, and there is general consensus that whiteness seeks invisibility (even while it is not always successful and can also be understood as hypervisible to those who do not benefit from it). A central aim of the study of whiteness, then, is to lay it bare and interrogate the "unexamined norm, implicitly standing for all that is presumed to be right and normal."[9]

Critical whiteness studies shares similarities to studies of masculinity, as both seek to name, problematize, and make (more) visible the center, or that which is dominant.[10] Many have pointed to the necessity and importance of such work, from Hazel Carby's call to "think about the invention of the category of whiteness"[11] to Alfred J. López's suggestion that "for perhaps the first time since its invention some few hundred years ago, whiteness finds itself to some extent caught in the others' gaze; it has come to be aware of itself as a race-object among other race-objects, or at least as an entity that can be and is apprehended that way by the others' gaze."[12] The tensions and contradictions that characterize critical whiteness studies are nevertheless well worth examining.

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8. Ibid., 59.

9. Margaret L. Andersen, "Whitewashing Race: Critical Perspectives on Whiteness," in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003), 24.

10. Heloise Brown, "Introduction: White? Women: Beginnings and Endings?" in *White? Women: Critical Perspectives on Gender and Race*, ed. Heloise Brown, Madi Gilkes, and Ann Kaloski-Naylor (York, UK: Raw Nerve Books, 1999), 6.

11. Hazel Carby, "The Multicultural Wars" in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent and Michelle Wallace (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 193.

12. Alfred J. López, ed., "Introduction: Whiteness After Empire," in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire* (Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 15.

Centering White Scholarship, Centering White Subjects

It is not necessary to look too far before one encounters the contention that critical whiteness studies started to be taken seriously only when white scholars took it up. Indeed, people of color have been thinking and talking about, theorizing, and resisting whiteness long before critical whiteness studies—or what could be understood as the "theoretical apparatus" sanctioned by the white academy[13]—had been taken seriously as a discipline. Thinkers like James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Harriet Jacobs, and countless others had been discussing whiteness in America well before critical whiteness studies was legitimized by the academy.[14] Indeed, in *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, published in 1935, W. E. B. Du Bois theorized about what we often refer to today as privilege (what he described as a sort of "public and psychological wage" granted to white laborers that, despite their meager remuneration, "had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them").[15] Yet, this idea is more often than not attributed to McIntosh, who is white and whose essay was published more than fifty years later. Dismissal of both early writings and contemporary work on whiteness by scholars of color is one of the major critiques leveled against the field.[16] What, then, is unique or new about critical whiteness studies? One is left to assume

13. Espinal, "A New Vocabulary for Inclusive Librarianship," 137.

14. See David Roediger, ed., *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to Be White* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998) for an excellent compilation of black writers on whiteness.

15. W. E. B. Du Bois, B*lack Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1995), 700-01; Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, "'White Privilege' Defanged: From Class War Analysis to Electoral Cynicism," *Abolition* (blog), October 27, 2016, https://abolitionjournal.org/white-privilege-defanged/.

16. Zeus Leonardo, Race F*rameworks: A Multidimensional Theory of Racism and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 98-101; Roediger, introduction to Black on White, 3-26.

that its novelty simply resides in its "explicit focus upon whiteness as a subject of study and the deliberate use of labels such as 'whiteness studies' to describe the field."[17]

It should come as no surprise, then, that critics of whiteness studies implore white scholars and activists to "consider the intimacy between privilege and the work we do, even in the work we do on privilege."[18] Zeus Leonardo further recommends that "a brutal self-reflection becomes necessary for Whites if Whiteness Studies is expected to avoid reproducing racial privilege at the level of intellectual production, despite the best intentions."[19] Yet, this position might appear to be at odds with others' insistence that white people do their own work,[20] that whites perform the labor of thinking through, working out, or solving problems presented by whiteness, a call that has also been made within LIS.[21] It is important, then, to avoid creating a line of inquiry that centers on white scholarship, while at the same time acknowledging the necessity for white people to assume a certain amount of responsibility for the whiteness question.

Additional criticism points to whiteness studies' insular focus on white subjects, which risks affirming or reifying the whiteness that it attempts to problematize in the first place. This fixation is evidenced by proposed solutions in the outstanding debate about what well-meaning white people are to *do* with their whiteness. One camp, a group often referred to as the "abolitionists," aims to simply get rid of whiteness

17. Woody Doane, "Rethinking Whiteness Studies," in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003), 5.

18. Sara Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism," *Borderlands* 3, no. 2 (2004): para. 55, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/ahmed_declarations.htm.

19. Leonardo, *Race Frameworks*, 98.

20. Cynthia Levine-Rasky, ed., Introduction to *Working Through Whiteness: International Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 1.

21. Chris Bourg, "Whiteness, Social Justice, and the Future of Libraries," *Feral Librarian* (blog), January 9, 2016, https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2016/01/09/whiteness-social-justice-and-the-future-of-libraries/.

altogether.[22] How exactly this abolition would be realized is unclear, though the general idea is that if a handful of white abolitionists—also referred to as "race traitors"—flagrantly rejects their allegiance to whiteness, the special privileges granted to those with white skin will be eliminated, and whiteness as a system will destabilize and collapse.

This position has been critiqued for its assumption that white people can simply shed their whiteness; indeed, if whiteness is a social construction—something that is not fixed but is continuously being renegotiated and remade in relation to gender, class, nation, and more—then we ought to remain skeptical of claims that it is possible to will oneself to be once and for all nonwhite. To simply declare oneself not white through individual acts of racial disavowal does not mean that others will stop regarding one as white, that one's whiteness will not continually be revived, rearticulated, and reinforced, or that one will automatically stop being afforded benefits under structures of privilege. Abolitionism naively suggests that personal choice can undo racial identities rooted in social processes and structures extending far beyond the control of the individual.[23] Such a solution places the responsibility of "solving" whiteness—and thus racism—in the hands of individual white subjects, effectively leaving no political space for the work of people of color.[24] Abolitionism has also been critiqued for (re)centering white male figures, such as abolitionist John Brown, as its ideal anti-racist heroes.[25]

In contrast to the abolitionist, the reconstructionist aims to rearticulate whiteness into something worthwhile and non-oppressive.

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22. John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev, "Toward a New Abolitionism: A *Race Traitor* Manifesto," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 346-49; Noel Ignatiev, "The Point is Not to Interpret Whiteness But to Abolish It" (presentation, The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness, Berkeley, California, April 11-13, 1997), http://racetraitor.org/abolishthepoint.pdf.

23. Andersen, "Whitewashing Race," 31.

24. Leonardo, *Race Frameworks*, 97-112.

25. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 167; López, "Introduction," 13; Robyn Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," *boundary* 2 26, no. 3 (1999): 140-41.

Anti-essentialist thinkers insist that because it is a social construct, whiteness ought not to be conflated with white racism, that it need not always be oppressive, and that it can, in a sense, be reinvented.[26] For example, Henry Giroux asserts the need for "an attempt to rearticulate Whiteness as part of a broader project of cultural, social, and political citizenship,"[27] and we can identify similar sentiments from those who seek to "de-colonize" white subjects or forge white, anti-racist political spaces. Yet, Leonardo challenges this strategy, suggesting that "arguing for a proud Whiteness conjures images of 'White pride,' whose history with White supremacy is intimate and familiar."[28] Margaret L. Andersen also questions the invitation to white people to call upon their particular histories, experiences, and cultures as sites of defiance, noting that here, it is again white subjects that do the resisting, reflecting, and empowering—from positions of whiteness.[29]

The turn to the particularities of whiteness is illustrated by the "white trash" school.[30] The analyses that emerge examine how whiteness intersects with, and is fashioned by, other facets of identity such as class. While it would be difficult to argue against the value of intersectional analysis and the work it does to demonstrate how race and other

26. See Henry Giroux, "Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 294-313; Henry Giroux, "Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity: Towards a Pedagogy and Politics of Whiteness," *Harvard Educational Review* 67, no. 2 (1997): 285-321, doi: 10.17763/haer.67.2.r4523gh4176677u8; Henry Giroux, "White Squall: Resistance and the Pedagogy of Whiteness," *Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (1997): 376-89, doi: 10.1080/095023897335664; Diana Jeater, "Roast Beef and Reggae Music: The Passing of Whiteness," *New Formations* 118 (Winter 1992): 114-17; Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 117-63; George Yudice, "Neither Impugning nor Disavowing Whiteness Does a Viable Politics Make: The Limits of Identity Politics," in *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*, ed. Christopher Newfield and Ronald Strickland (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 255-83.

27. Giroux, "Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity," 297.

28. Leonardo, *Race Frameworks*, 88.

29. Andersen, "Whitewashing Race," 31.

30. Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," 122.

identities are co-constitutive, some warn against lingering in specificity and instead point to the need to explore the ways in which whiteness is produced and operates across age, gender, sex, class, and the like. It is worth quoting Richard Dyer at length: "Yet the strength of white representation, as I've suggested, is the apparent absence altogether of the typical, the sense that being white is coterminous with the endless plenitude of human diversity. If we are to see the historical, cultural, and political limitations (to put it mildly) of white world domination, it is important to see similarities, typicalities, within the seemingly infinite variety of white representation."[31]

Further, in calling attention to particularized whiteness and in positioning white subjects as disadvantaged, minoritized, injured, racialized, or as "prewhite" ethnics,[32] we risk creating space for such subjects to "avoid critical confrontations with contemporary U.S. race relations in order to exempt themselves personally from complicity or responsibility."[33] This position further suggests that "only in becoming 'nonwhite,' only in retrieving a prewhite ethnicity, can the anti-racist subject be invented."[34] This is reminiscent of the race traitor position, as it champions a white subject who authenticates their own anti-racism through self-authorized white distancing or disaffiliation.

In attempting to locate and problematize whiteness, anti-racist solutions posed by abolitionists, reconstructionists, and those of the white trash school risk more firmly lodging it in the center. The preceding critique should not be confused with a simple dismissal of the important anti-racist work done under the banner of any of these camps, nor should it be read as an assertion that all whiteness scholarship fits neatly into one or any of these three categories. However, outlining these

31. Richard Dyer, "White," in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 145.

32.Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," 139.

33. Mimi Thi Nguyen, Introduction to *Evolution of a Race Riot* 1 (1998): 4, https://issuu.com/poczineproject/docs/evolution-of-a-race-riot-issue-1.

34. Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," 139.

positions and the criticisms they invite allows us to see how whiteness can sully even the strategies meant to challenge it.

White Privilege Pedagogy, White Privilege Politics

John D. Berry's 2004 short piece entitled "White Privilege in Library Land" implores white LIS practitioners to become aware of their white privilege.[35] He connects white privilege to diversity (though what he means by diversity is unclear), contending that "accepting this awareness" of privilege "is critical if you have a commitment to the goals and values of diversity and equity."[36] Introducing a list of white privileges he identifies in LIS, Berry further stipulates that such a list "will get at the heart of why diversity matters."[37] He encourages readers to attend diversity events, suggesting that attendance can prompt personal change in white perception and understanding of privilege. Berry's call thus gives rise to a number of questions: Does ignorance of white privilege produce or perpetuate inequity, or that which diversity purportedly is not?[38] How does one go about acknowledging white privilege? Is such acknowledgement a means to an end or an end in itself? What sort of change does individual awareness of privilege enable?

While it is perhaps the first explicit call for white subjects in LIS to consider their privilege, Berry's piece is one of many that followed McIntosh's 1988 essay. Since its publication, many have framed the recognition of privilege as a necessary prerequisite to anti-racism or even as an anti-racist act itself. McIntosh herself insists that "describing white privilege makes one newly accountable,"[39] and accounting

35. Berry, "White Privilege in Library Land."

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. See Hudson, "On 'Diversity' as Anti-Racism" for a critique of diversity discourse, and Hathcock, "White Librarianship in Blackface" for a critique of diversity initiatives. Both suggest that "diversity" as it is currently conceived of and practiced in LIS is not antithetical to whiteness.

39. McIntosh, "White Privilege."

for white privilege has accordingly become something of a trope in critical whiteness studies and among white self-identified anti-racists. The fascination with teaching about privilege—of calling upon white privilege as a way to introduce problems posed by white supremacy and to assert anti-racist solutions—can be understood as what Barbara Applebaum calls "white privilege pedagogy."[40]

The aspiration to learn about and thus recognize white privilege raises questions of agency. If part of the definition of white privilege is that it is something about which white subjects are "meant to remain oblivious,"[41] and if white privilege, like whiteness itself, is invested in its invisibility, then can one ever become fully aware of its various manifestations? If privilege—again, like whiteness—is an elusive yet permeative norm, can we ever see it for what it is? Indeed, Sara Ahmed suggests that one "cannot simply unlearn privilege when the cultures in which learning take place are shaped by privilege."[42] This raises a second question of whether the project of becoming aware of one's privilege is one that "could never attain completion."[43] As many have argued, the "self-work" called for in relation to white privilege—often an exercise in expunging guilt—can easily turn into an endless and all-encompassing project of self-improvement. This leaves one wondering, as Fredrik deBoer asks, "whether our goal is to *be* good or to *do* good."[44]

Even if someone were to become fully aware of their privilege—if they were, in a sense, to attain completion—how do they use such knowledge to counter, resist, or reject privileges that are conferred rather

40. Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 4, 29-34.

41. McIntosh, "White Privilege."

42. Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness," para. 40.

43. Sonia Kruks, "Simone De Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege," Hypatia 20, no.1 (2005): 184, doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.2005.tb00378.x.

44. Fredrik deBoer, "Admitting that White Privilege Helps You is Really Just Congratulating Yourself," *Washington Post,* January 28, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/01/28/when-white-people-admit-white-privilege-theyre-really-just-congratulating-themselves/.

than chosen? Can one un-choose privilege? As Sonia Kruks notes, "the structural asymmetries of privilege, and so also our degrees of implications in it, may sometimes be mitigated but cannot be expunged through our own individual volition."[45] Yet, if we entertain the possibility that one were able to successfully (and fully) first unlearn, then unchoose or resist their privilege—or even, like the abolitionist, reject their whiteness—we must then ask what change this can effect. In other words, what political possibilities can a project of individual reform like white privilege pedagogy facilitate?

The link between (un)learning privilege and social change is perhaps not as clear as we are often led to believe. In a critique directed at critical whiteness studies, Ahmed poses salient challenges to those who consider learning about white privilege to be effective, particularly due to the implication that "the absence of such learning is the 'reason' for inequality and injustice."[46] Indeed, such an idea rests on the common yet unfounded assumption that ignorance breeds racism, an assumption that frames racism solely as an attitudinal or psychological rather than a structural problem.[47] Thus, we must be careful to not frame lack of awareness of white privilege as the *cause* of oppression in and of itself. While I am not suggesting that learning about white privilege is an endeavor without any value, the key distinction—that while racial awareness is necessary to fight injustice, its absence is not the cause of injustice—is often overlooked in white privilege pedagogy and can lead to the erroneous conclusion that the world is unjust because individuals are uneducated or unaware, rather than because there are any number of systems and structures (including those that rely on educational

45. Kruks, "Simone De Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege," 184.

46. Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness," para. 37.

47. Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Racial Coded Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 49; David Theo Goldberg, "Racisms and Rationalities," in *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 117-47; Alastair Bonnett, *Anti-Racism* (London: Routledge, 2005).

institutions for their operation) invested in white supremacy and that profit from racial oppression.[48]

As a field, we ought to remain critical of the narratives surrounding learning and liberation, or what Michael J. Monahan calls a "racial morality play" leading to "white . . . redemption,"[49] taking into account what we obscure or even perpetuate when our energies are focused on educating individual subjects.[50] Surely, while white privilege pedagogy carries heuristic benefits as far as race conscientization, when we ask students, practitioners, and the like to consider whiteness only through the framework of privilege, we risk drawing attention away from, and thus perhaps unwittingly contribute to, the maintenance of white supremacy and the structural arrangements that produce such privilege.[51]

In following the trajectory of white privilege pedagogy, it is often the case that once the white subject is adequately "enlightened," the next step is to disclose or even broadcast one's privilege. While we do not see this in Berry's short piece, deBoer contends that this is a ritualistic part of the white privilege "cottage industry," perhaps best exemplified by hip hop duo Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' 2016 song, "White Privilege II."[52] This act is concerning, however, and in utilizing personal testimony as a strategy to explore and examine privilege, a

48. The prison industrial complex, for example. For more, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010) and George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness," in *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002), 67-90.

49. Michael J. Monahan, "The Concept of Privilege: A Critical Appraisal," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (2014): 81, doi: 10.1080/02580136.2014.892681.

50. See Hudson, "On 'Diversity' as Anti-Racism" and David James Hudson and Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, "On Structures and Self-Work: Locating Anti-Racist Politics in LIS" (presentation, LACUNY Institute, "Race Matters: Libraries, Racism, and Antiracism," Brooklyn, New York, May 20, 2016), https://youtu.be/LsmIoDJ4Fz0.

51. Ibid; Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good*, 30.

52. deBoer, "Admitting that White Privilege Helps;" Macklemore and Ryan Lewis (musical group), "White Privilege II," performed by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, featuring Jamila Woods. Macklemore LLC, 2016.

number of scholars and activists have pointed out that such narratives often devolve into grandiose displays that promote a suffering and pity-inducing white subject.[53] The white individual, riddled by guilt and the burden of penance, thus becomes the subject of investigation and functions as the site of emotional connection for the audience. López writes: "White liberal guilt at its most performative has the . . . effect of diverting attention from the facts of white racism and oppression to how badly the Enlightened White Liberal feels about it."[54]

We can further make sense of the disclosure of white privilege when we understand it as an "unhappy performative."[55] The admission of privilege appears to condemn the white subject, to implicate them in their whiteness. What it asserts, however, is that the subject's understanding of their privilege represents a transcendence of their whiteness and the full realization of a self-critical, anti-racist subjectivity. For Ahmed, then, this admission is empty, meaning that "the conditions are not in place that would allow such 'saying' to 'do' what it 'says'."[56] Unfortunately, disclosure instead operates as a self-congratulatory act in which individuals "pay a kind of grudging penance for their own white privilege and move on, inevitably and fairly quickly, to the white privilege of others."[57]

Leonardo suggests that such displays prevent movement towards constructive investigations of how whiteness affects people of color. While they might be cathartic for white individuals, he contends that public disclosures of privilege are in result "assaulting" for people of color who are reminded "about their lack of privilege" and further "reinforce those [white] privileges when it stays at the level of

53. For a LIS-specific critique, see Robin Kurz, "No More Privilege Porn," *Transforming American Libraries* (blog), February 13, 2016, http://www.transformingamericanlibraries.com/2016/02/no-more-privilege-porn.html.

54. López, "Introduction," 23.

55. Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness," para. 54.

56. Ibid.

57. deBoer, "Admitting that White Privilege Helps." See also Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good*, 31-32, and Sara Ahmed, "Progressive Racism," *feministkilljoys* (blog), May 30, 2016, https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/05/30/progressive-racism/.

confessionals."[58] He concludes that "White discovery of racial advantage is new mainly *to* Whites,"[59] again pointing to the fact that the "discoveries" of white people regarding whiteness are in fact not discoveries at all. Kara Brown leaves us with what is perhaps a more scathing indictment: "And they simply confirm what we already know: white privilege is fucking amazing."[60]

Finally, in scholarly and activist circles alike, one often encounters the suggestion that once white privilege is (publicly) acknowledged, the white subject should "use" this privilege for "good." Often, this means that white people engage in anti-racist work as what are commonly referred to as "allies" to people of color or members of other oppressed groups. This move demands not only that white individuals take up a particular subject position, but also call upon their privilege as a resource. White privilege pedagogy thus sends its pupils mixed messages, for while we are told that white privilege is something to be resisted or countered, we are also encouraged to leverage it for involvement in anti-racist work. Ewuare X. Osayande illustrates the confusion this call creates, suggesting that white privilege is nothing more than the stuff of white supremacy. He implores us to "imagine a white anti-racist saying, 'I'm going to use my white supremacy to help people of color.'"[61] Like the reconstructionist, the ally who invokes their whiteness as a point of departure into anti-racist work "locate[s] agency in this place. It is also to re-position the white subject as somewhere other than implicated in the critique."[62] Certainly this is not to say that advocating with or sup-

58. Leonardo, *Race Frameworks*, 100. As one reviewer noted, Leonardo's claims perhaps generalize the ways in which people of color experience white privilege confessionals.

59. Ibid.

60. Kara Brown, "The Problem with #CrimingWhileWhite," *Jezebel* (blog), December 4, 2014 (3:30 p.m.), http://jezebel.com/the-problem-with-crimingwhilewhite-1666785471.

61 Ewuare X. Osayande, "Word to the Wise: Unpacking the White Privilege of Tim Wise," *Ewuare X. Osayande,* August 26, 2013, http://osayande.org/2013/08/word-to-the-wise-unpacking-the-white-privilege-of-tim-wise/.

62. Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 164-65, doi: 10.1177/1464700107078139.

porting marginalized groups is a bad thing, but rather that accounting for the dynamics by which allyship can reproduce or reinforce existing power relations is a necessary prerequisite to action.

Navigating Whiteness Critique

As demonstrated, the study of whiteness presents a number of challenges. It is critical, therefore, that as scholars we not only expose whiteness in the field, but also attend to the *act* of studying it. For those of us who identify as white, doing so demands rigorous reflexivity—not to be confused with a self-absorbed fixation on personal improvement—and perhaps without the expectation of any sort of ethical resolution. In considering the implications of studying race, white scholars claiming anti-racism ought to keep in mind the tensions created by doing such work in LIS,[63] a field that has a troubled history of elevating white voices and dismissing scholars of color.[64]

Scholars, and again, particularly those who are white, would do well to embrace ambivalence regarding their involvement both with critical whiteness studies specifically and race studies more generally, situating their work within what Sveta Stoytcheva describes as an "ethics of contingency."[65] In describing such an ethics for librarianship, she suggests that "foregrounding contingency as a lens to think through complex situations . . . can help us formulate an ethical stance through a better understanding of how our work intersects with power."[66] Recognition of context requires that we take seriously the dynamics in which we

63. Though it contains potentially problematic personal testimony, George Yancy, ed., *White Self-Criticality Beyond Anti-Racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015) addresses many of the limitations of white anti-racism.

64. Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line," 14-18.

65. Sveta Stoytcheva, "Steven Salaita, the Critical Importance of Context, and Our Professional Ethics," *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship* 1, no.1 (2016): 92, http://www.cjal.ca/index.php/capal/article/viewFile/24309/19471.

66. Ibid., 93.

study, theorize, and problematize race. This means that we not only entertain the possibility that our dedication to, or aspiration towards, anti-racism and anti-white supremacy positions us as part of the solution, but also that, in other contexts, it might mean that we are always already part of the problem. Certainly, one's embeddedness within structures of power ought to lead us to treat as suspect any claim to have "arrived" at anti-racism, or any claim to be operating from within a purely anti-racist space.[67]

If our profession is to benefit from its intellectual foray into whiteness critique, none of us should refrain from asking the difficult questions of whether our work contributes to epistemic violence through the intellectual reproduction of whiteness; to the valorization of the white, anti-racist subject; or to the preoccupation with and subsequent privileging of white experience, identity, and self-improvement. In spite of the enormity of the tensions outlined above, I maintain that working within these challenges, however frustrating, can be productive. Such a commitment likely involves lingering in sites of anxiety, but it also creates room for us to remain invested in a "critical engagement with whiteness that does not muffle its own internal conflicts."[68] Remaining committed to criticality allows us to acknowledge these tensions and exploit them for their generative properties. Indeed, in keeping the limitations of whiteness studies in sight, I suggest we not abandon this project altogether. As many of the contributors to this collection do, we might instead draw from other thinkers, theories, and frameworks to tease apart the contradictions of whiteness scholarship, forging a more sophisticated, nuanced, and ultimately transformative critique.

67. Aspirations of purity can be problematic. See Kruks, "Simone De Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege," 185, for an excellent critique of purism as it pertains to white feminism. See also Kristyn Caragher, this volume, for a related critique of perfectionism in anti-racist work.

68. Levine-Rasky, Introduction, 12.

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