Educating for Whiteness: Applying Critical Race Theory's Revisionist History in Library and Information Science Research: A Methodology Paper

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Research into education for librarianship has failed to explore the historical development of the subject or to establish the social and cultural contexts within which it developed. Such historical background and context are essential for exploring and understanding issues of race and of systemic and institutionalized racism. Historical methodology, coupled with the revisionist history of Critical Race Theory, asks how the social/institutional structures of white society determined the construction of librarianship and education for librarianship in the African-American community, explores issues of whiteness and white privilege, and investigates how this influenced African Americans' perception of the profession and their place and role in it. It addresses intersectionality and essentialism and seeks to understand the thoughts and feelings of the African Americans involved in the process who were disregarded and ignored.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, diversity, education for librarianship, librarianship, revisionist history

Far too often, research into education for librarianship fails to explore the historical development of the subject of interest or to establish the social and cultural contexts within which it developed. Carmichael's (1991) review demonstrated that the field had been plagued by ahistoricity to that date, while the subsequent work of library historians such as Wiegand (1999), Dain (2000), Jenkins (2000), and Knott Malone (2000) documents the continuing disregard for the historical context of current problems and issues. In most cases, we have little to no understanding of the social, cultural, or individual factors that influenced the development of the modern situation we are attempting to study. We simply begin to study it as it is, as if the current situation were the natural, expected, normal condition.

While historical background and context are vital to understanding where we came from and how we got to where we are in all areas, it is particularly essential to exploring and understanding issues of race and of systemic and institutionalized racism. The social and cultural attitudes and practices that created and support systemic and institutionalized racism are frequently subtle, inconspicuous, and unobtrusive, or, to the contrary, are obvious, evident, and taken for granted as normal and natural. Only

revisionist history—that is, historical methodology combined with Critical Race Theory—can uncover the roots of such attitudes and practices, trace their development and acceptance within the profession, challenge the racist foundations of current concepts and practices, and illuminate our blind spots. Taken together, they can help us to understand not only what decisions were made that instituted such systemic racism but also why those decisions were made, whether alternatives existed, and, if so, what they were and why they were rejected or ignored.

KEY POINTS:

- Education for librarianship is founded on a white, male Western construction of profession and professional.
- Revisionist history is necessary in order to uncover the roots of systemic and institutional racism which underly current constructions of the profession.
- Challenging these racist foundations of current attitudes and practices is essential to increasing diversity within the profession.

That such research is lacking has been well demonstrated. In 1996, Lorna Peterson wrote that, "[a]lthough there has been scholarship in the area of race and racism, it has not been given the serious attention it deserves," and she called for scholars in the field to acknowledge ethnic studies and accord race studies "the respect for intellectual expertise we award to other areas" (p. 172). She further explicates, "We would infuse our curriculum and research with race, gender, and social class and not leave these as asides. . . . We would bring historians, sociologists, and political scientists into our work to provide the content missing from so many of our discussions on race" (p. 173).

Nearly ten years later, Todd Honma (2005) would reiterate Peterson's critique and charge, writing that "[w]hat has most often surfaced in the discourse of LIS is a benign liberal multiculturalism that celebrates difference and promotes 'cross-cultural understanding' empty of critical analysis of race and racism." He argues that, due to the uncritical acceptance of the positivist paradigm in LIS scholarship, with its roots in white male middle-class European hegemony, such scholarship "elides critical discourse on race and racial equality" by excluding voices of color. He calls for LIS to "oppose traditional disciplinary models of scholarship and learning and instead take its cues from" ethnic studies, women's studies, and queer studies.

In a review of the LIS literature published between 1947 and 1997, Wiegand (2000) found such literature lacking in the use of critical theories and urged library historians to apply social historical and other critical theories to their research in order to situate library history within the broader US history. Contributors to Leckie, Given, and Buschman's *Critical Theory for Library and Information Science* (2010) likewise encouraged

all library scholars to employ critical methodologies from the disciplines of the humanities, social sciences, and education in their explorations of the field. Velez & Villa-Nicholas (2017), in a follow-up to Wiegand (2000), found that, while there has been progress in historical studies of race and racism in libraries, many areas still remain to be examined, including private libraries, most areas of print culture studies, special libraries, and library education. Also lacking are studies of races and ethnicities outside of the black/white binary, as well as gender, sexuality, and class, and the intersections among all of these. Of the handful of scholars they identified as utilizing critical theories, only one, Christine Pawley (2006), had looked at race in LIS education, and she looked at how race is presented within the existing curriculum, rather than at how race shaped the construction of education for librarianship.

Writing on the continuing lack of diversity in librarianship in the United States, Vinopal (2016) identifies such underlying factors as "discrepancies in socioeconomic status based on race and ethnicity . . . which are inherited generationally" and result in lower educational attainment, the historic normalization of whiteness and marginalizing of difference by the dominant professional culture, including differences not only in race but also in gender, sexual orientation, and class, and a "willful ignorance of bias" within the profession. Hathcock (2015) demonstrates that "diversity programs . . . are themselves coded to promote whiteness as the norm in the profession and unduly burden those individuals they are most intended to help," where "whiteness" "refers not only to racial and ethnic categorizations but a complete system of exclusion based on hegemony . . . the privilege and power that acts to reinforce itself through hegemonic cultural practice that excludes all who are different." Examples include the mistaking of a librarian of colour for a library assistant, genderqueer librarians forced to choose between binary gender groupings of restrooms, and a new graduate from a working-class background and with a limited income being advised to purchase a suit in order to interview successfully.

Methodologies

Historical methodology

Historical methodology is particularly suited to exploring both the broader landscape of society and culture as well as the narrower view at the level of the individual and the personal by utilizing a wide variety of primary documents produced by a broad range of individuals and institutions. A theoretical perspective, in this case Critical Race Theory, is then utilized to interpret the information that has been gathered, focusing in particular on issues of race, gender, socioeconomic class, power, and privilege, and on the points at which these factors intersect.

The raw materials or data of history are primary documents produced by governments, organizations, communities, and other groups in the

form of annual reports, minutes of meetings, correspondence, newsletters, newspaper articles and press releases, budgets, membership lists, and other formal and informal materials that both explicitly and implicitly reflect their vision, mission, goals, and objectives, as well as policies and procedures. Minutes in particular may give information about the issues that were discussed, the content of the discussions, the decisions that were reached, and the reasons for those decisions. Primary documents created by individuals, including letters, diaries, journals, interviews, and literary and artistic works, as well as those created about the individual by others, including vital records, biographical sketches, newspaper articles, and obituaries, reveal the individual's race, gender, and socioeconomic status, and so much more. They provide insight into the lives of those individuals in their own words, into their attitudes, aspirations, and achievements.

Locating and gaining access to the documents is simple when compared with other forms of data collection (e.g., IRB approval is not usually required), yet time consuming. The greatest challenge is identifying the location, as documents can be located in library special collections, archives, local history collections, and government agencies. They may also be found in antique stores and used book stores and attics and basements. Today, many of them, especially newspapers, have been digitized and are available through digital archives and special collections. These include such collections as *Afro-Americana Imprints, 1535-1922: From the Library Company of Philadelphia*, *The American Slavery Collection, 1820-1922: From the American Antiquarian Society*, *African American Newspapers, 1827-1998*, and *Freedom on the Move*, a database of fugitive slave advertisements housed at Cornell University, as well as *Archives Unbound (African American Studies)*, *Black Thought and Culture*, and *Black Studies in Video*.

Historical researchers begin with national and international catalogs such as OCLC and the National Archives Catalog, as well as any subject-specific catalogs in order to identify special collections and archives holdings. Vital records are retrieved from the relevant government agencies, as are local government documents. Local history collections are often discovered through a simple Internet search, and through references from colleagues and fellow researchers. Researchers post queries on websites and listservs of related groups to request assistance from others who may have or know of relevant documents.

In addition to letters, diaries, journals, and interviews, primary data from individuals are more and more frequently being collected through oral histories. Researchers utilize structured interview protocols to elicit individuals' memories about their everyday lives, their families and communities, and events through which they lived. Oral histories are most frequently recorded using audiotapes or videotapes, which may also be transcribed. Such histories provide a variety of diverse, personal perspectives as well as emotional reactions and interpretations.

Recent works that have examined the history of race and public librarianship in the United States include Graham's (2002) *A Right to Read: Segregation and Civil Rights in Alabama's Public Libraries, 1900-1965*; Cheryl Knott's (2015) *Not Free, Not For All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow*, winner of the 2016 Eliza Atkins Gleason Award; and 2019's winner, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South* by Wayne A. Wiegand and Shirley A. Wiegand (2018).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory as a whole studies the "relationship among race, racism, and power . . . in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group-and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 16). The central tenets of CRT state, first, that "racism is ordinary . . . the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color," that it is institutionalized within society. A second tenet, material determinism, holds that racism benefits both wealthy and working-class whites due to a convergence of their interests in maintaining the social hierarchy. Furthermore, CRT has demonstrated that the concept of "race" and the definition of "the races" are socially constructed, and that these constructions change to meet the needs of the white majority. Additional core tenets are intersectionality—the notion that every person "has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 19)—and anti-essentialism, the rejection of the view that individuals are what they are because of a defined set of characteristics that cannot change.

Also of importance is structural determinism, which maintains that the structure of our social and cultural system—the language, the laws, the norms and values—determines how people think, behave, and interact with others. Because it is structural and therefore obscure, we are usually unconscious of its influence. A form of structural determinism that is particularly applicable to the LIS field is the "empathic fallacy," which argues that "messages, scripts, and stereotypes . . . are embedded in the . . . national psyche" such that it is impossible to "change a narrative by merely offering another, better one" in the expectation that "empathy will quickly and reliably take over" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 27). The lack of empathy can be attributed to the reality that "most people in their daily lives do not come into contact with many persons of radically different race or social station," a situation that is typical of schools of library and information science. The vast majority—85% or more—of the students are white, English-speaking, middle-class women. They are college graduates who are financially able to attend graduate school and are confident of their ability to obtain a professional position after graduation. They are the epitome of "whiteness."

"Whiteness," or the social construction of the white race and white racial superiority, is the subject of Critical White Studies, which asks "what

it means to be white, how whiteness became established legally, how certain groups moved in and out of the category of whiteness, 'passing,' the phenomenon of white power and white supremacy, and the automatic privileges that come with membership in the dominant race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 46). In the United States for the past century or more, whiteness has meant specifically the culture, values, attitudes, standards, and expectation of white, English-speaking, middle-class Christian citizens of Anglo-Saxon descent, the "WASPs" of the mid-twentieth century.

Of particular interest to education for librarianship is the fact that "whiteness is also normative . . . it sets the standard" by which other peoples and cultures are judged and is therefore privileged. This privilege "refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 47), as well as the right to determine who will be included and who will be excluded. Critical White Studies calls for an exploration of the historical, cultural, and sociological aspects of those identified as white, and for a dissection of construction of "white" as normal and neutral. "Whites do not see themselves as having a race. . . . [T]hey do not believe that they think and reason from a white viewpoint, from a universally valid one" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 48). Any critical analysis, therefore, requires a consideration both of overt racism—the oppression of people of color—and white privilege—the normalization of white values, standards, and culture, with accompanying internalized racism.

The usefulness of Critical Race Theory in gaining insights into the history of education has been demonstrated by Olden's (2015) study of the history of school desegregation in Denver in light of the dynamics of race and racial formation. Analyzing that history through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Latino Race Theory revealed the "multi-dimensional character" of race, "as well as its power to dictate social relations and material realities" (Olden, 2105, p. 258). While Mexican-American parents on the one hand claimed that their child was white, "the state also participated in racial formation by racializing student bodies from above" as non-white, and "ultimately, institutionalized racial knowledge" (Olden, 2015, p. 259). The study demonstrated the "continued reliance on a White-non-White binary of race . . . and underscores the need for a more nuanced interpretation of race in the United States" (Olden, 2015, p. 259).

Other researchers have applied Critical Race Theory to the history and place of affirmative action in higher education (Solarzano & Yosso, 2002), and issues of race and whiteness in science teacher education (Mensah, 2019), dance education (Kerr-Berry, 2016), kinesiology (Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005), and teacher education (King, 2019). Patton (2016) proposes a Critical Race Theory of Higher Education that will expose the ways in which higher education has functioned to uphold and defend racism and white supremacy, based on the earlier work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who proposed a Critical Race Theory of Education.

Revisionist history

Of the various themes and methods that constitute Critical Race theory today, the one most relevant to studying the history of education for librarianship in the United States is revisionist history. Revisionist historians re-examine "America's historical record, replacing comforting majoritarian interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minorities' experiences" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 24). They frequently "look to things like profit, labor supply, international relations, and the interest of elite whites" and explore how material and cultural forces operate together in synergy.

Utilizing revisionist history as a method affects more than the analysis. It influences the questions that will be asked, the assumptions that will be made, the documents that will be searched for and accepted as relevant, and the sources of information that will be consulted. For instance, while records created by white institutions such as ALA may be consulted, they will not be viewed as "objective" and "neutral" but rather as products of an institution that reflects white values, standards, and expectations. They will be acknowledged as representing only one perspective, not as representing "the true" perspective.

A revisionist critique of some research on LIS education

I will now critically analyze Martin and Shiflett's (1996) study, "Hampton, Fisk, and Atlanta: The Foundations, the American Library Association, and Library Education for Blacks, 1925-1941" using revisionist history and demonstrate where it is lacking in its interpretation of the race and whiteness in LIS education in the United States. This is the only study of library education for African Americans to be conducted after the development of Critical Race Theory and revisionist history as a separate movement around 1990. The same criticisms apply to earlier works (DuMont, 1986a, 1986b; Gunn, 1986), but evaluating them according to a theoretical perspective that post-dates them would be to commit the historical fallacy of presentism.

Summary and analysis of Martin and Shiflett (1996)

Education for Librarianship

In 1925, the Board of Education for Librarianship of the American Library Association, in cooperation with the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the General Education Board created by John D. Rockefeller, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund, founded a library school at the racially segregated Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, over the objections of African Americans. Walter White, assistant secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), noted that "this proposed school will not only not be approved by thinking colored people, it will be vigorously opposed and resented" (Martin & Shiflett, 1996, p. 306).

George Settle, director of the Louisville Free Public Library's formal library education program for black library workers for nearly 20 years, proposed to ALA that his school be given an official role in the training of black librarians (Martin & Shiflett, 1996, p. 301). Ernestine Rose, an advocate for service to African Americans and head of the Harlem Branch of the New York Public Library, wrote to ALA president Charles F. Belden that the plans had been made without "open discussion or inquiry among many of those most deeply interested. . . . I refer to [white] librarians like myself . . . and to influential and progressive Negroes, the very people it is proposed to serve" (Martin & Shiflett, 1996, pp. 305–306).

Despite acknowledging that "Hampton never enjoyed the widespread support from the Black community, which felt that it perpetuated segregation," Martin and Shiflett (1996) not only neglected to explore the issue from the perspective of black librarians and the black community but also declared that it "is time to close the book on the mystery of Hampton and move on to other intriguing questions in the development of libraries and librarianship" (p. 322), believing, apparently, that having answered the who and what and when of the story was sufficient. The later decision to open the school at Atlanta University in 1941 was, again, made by the white leadership of ALA and over the objections of black library leaders such as Wallace Van Jackson (DuMont, 1986a).

If one examines these events through the critical lens of revisionist history, it is clear that the establishment of education for librarianship for African Americans in the United States was dominated by middle-class white men and funded by white corporations. It is an example of white middle-class male hegemony, in which the leadership of the ALA imposed its definition of the profession and of education for that profession on the African-American community. It is also an example of white privilege, with the leadership of ALA determining who would be included in the profession and who would be excluded, according to white cultural standards and values. ALA rejected Settle's proposal because, by 1925, it had determined that education for librarianship should emulate that of the white, male professions by being taught in an academic department of a recognized college or university by faculty who themselves were graduates of a library school, and resulting in an academic degree (Stauffer, 2016).

A revisionist history would ask why no one in the African-American library community had been included in the discussions of where African Americans were to be educated for librarianship, let alone how and for what purpose. It would ask who else had been excluded. It would ask why the Board of Education made no effort to determine what library services the various African-American communities wanted or needed or how best to train librarians to provide those services and meet those needs. It would question the assumption that the white, middle-class model of librarianship was appropriate.

Revisionist history would challenge the social determinism inherent in this story and ask different questions, such as how the social/institutional

structures of white society determined the construction of librarianship and education for librarianship in the African-American community. It would explore issues of whiteness and white privilege, including how the ALA construction of librarianship and education for librarianship for African Americans reflected and embodied whiteness and white privilege. It would ask how this influenced African Americans' perception of the profession and their place and role in it.

It would search for additional resources that would enable the researcher to address issues of intersectionality and essentialism, including the intersections of race, class, and sex in the construction of the profession for African-American librarians as individuals and as a group. It would determine the differences among those at different intersections, and ask how that affected their professional and personal identities. It would recognize that the ALA was restricting membership to the middle-class, educated, urban segment of the black community, the segment that most approximated the ALA's middle-class, educated, urban white membership.

The revisionist historian would seek to understand the thoughts and feelings of the African Americans involved in the process who were disregarded and ignored, as well as their vision of the role of libraries in the lives of African-American communities. The revisionist historian would attempt to rectify the errors of the Board of Education and determine what library services the various African-American communities wanted or needed, and how best to train librarians to provide those services and meet those needs. The revisionist historian would reject the assumption that the educational model of the traditional white, male professions is the "normal, natural, or true" model and entertain other models as equally valid.

It would go beyond established institutional histories to ask how African Americans obtained information before they had access to public libraries, explore who the gatekeepers of information in the community were, and determine why African Americans sought information and how they used it. One area of research with promise in this area is that of "practical literacy," also known as "everyday information needs and information seeking," which has yet to be tied to library history, although it is a growing area of research in print culture.

The Structure of the Curriculum and the Faculty

Revisionist history would focus a critical lens on the history of the development of the curriculum and of the standards for accreditation and ask how whiteness has influenced both. It would ask why certain topics are given precedence and importance, while others are minimized or ignored entirely. It would ask for whom the curriculum has been designed. What are the conscious and unconscious expectations and how do these reflect whiteness and white privilege? Who were the expected students? What were their characteristics: personal, financial, academic, and so on? Their career goals and expectations? What positions was the program designed

to prepare them for? Who were the students being prepared to serve, and in what ways and why? Who were the program's stakeholders, and what kind of input did they have?

It would examine not only the academic and professional requirements for tenure-track faculty but also the expectations in terms of speech, language, clothing, dress, deportment, and so forth. It would dissect the interview process, exposing the embedded aspects of white privilege in its conscious and unconscious expectations. It would investigate the use of adjunct faculty, asking who and why and what the effect was of whiteness and white privilege.

Diversity in the profession

Increasing diversity in the profession is an ongoing concern, yet most researchers look at how successful various recruitment programs have been in attracting people of color, rather than exploring why it is that people of color are not attracted to librarianship. While there is some consideration of financial barriers, there is little to no consideration of the issues of the whiteness of the profession raised by Peterson (1996), Honma (2005), Vinopal (2016), Hathcock (2015), and the Black Caucus of the ALA, and of the whiteness of existing diversity programs.

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