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Beyond the Left: Documenting American Racism in Print Periodicals at the Wisconsin Historical Society, and Theorizing (Radical) Collections Today

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Beyond the Left: Documenting American Racism in Print Periodicals at the Wisconsin Historical Society, and Theorizing (Radical) Collections Today

*Dear Well-Meaning White People Who Want Nothing to do with Alt-Right: We, people of color, cannot carry this burden. You must engage.*¹

-Jose Antonio Vargas

*White supremacy in the United States is a central organizing principle of social life rather than merely an isolated social movement.*²

-Jessie Daniels

*...this paper is a call to action: it is a plea for practicing archivists to work actively and diligently against white supremacist bias by documenting white supremacist violence against Black Americans.*³

-Tonia Sutherland

Sometime near 2005, while working at the Wisconsin Historical Society, I reached out to an editor to inquire about a recent publication. I emailed because I had discovered a print newsletter that they had been publishing for some time, which the Society did not yet hold. I hadn't expected a response based on the organization's web page—their site looked outdated and I couldn't tell whether it was currently being maintained. Yet I got a very quick and enthusiastic response. The editor was happy to hear from me, and had good news: not only would they be able to send the newsletters, but because they had members of their group located nearby in the next county, they would be able to get the issues to us right away.

This encounter became memorable because the editor I was corresponding with was an unabashed white supremacist, his organization tied to the Ku Klux Klan. The fact that there was a nearby location for members of this organization was a chilling disappointment.⁴ Almost a decade later, I can't remember the title of the publication, although I am still haunted by the correspondence. I can't easily work backward to figure out which title it was, either--the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) currently holds 37 serial titles under the subject heading *Ku Klux Klan--Periodicals*, the majority of which are written not by those studying white supremacy, but by those who actively uphold or represent white hate.⁵

As a white woman raised in a working class family in the Midwest, I was aware of

¹ Vargas, Jose Antonio. Twitter Post. August 12, 2017, 12:53 AM.

<https://twitter.com/joseiswriting/status/896233228935221248>

² Jessie Daniels, *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 11.

³ Tonia Sutherland. "Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional Restorative Justice." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.42>.

⁴ See the full list of active groups affiliated with the Ku Klux Klan currently tracked by the Southern Poverty Law Center here: <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan>

⁵ If I had to guess that it might have been *The Flame*, out of Dayton, Ohio, because I distinctly remember the headquarters of the publication being located in the northern US.

the ways that white people express fear.⁶ I was also aware of hate groups--there had been times when racist literature was literally in the air; I distinctly remember unfolding a crumpled flyer that had blown down my street, feeling haunted while realizing that this method of distribution required such close proximity (much like how I felt at the WHS, realizing groups were organizing nearby). My husband's parents likewise found literature condemning (their) interracial marriage on their lawn, but their tires also slashed. This was not long ago; the late 1980s and 1990s.

I've thought about this chapter and what I might say here with every subsequent day lived in America with a white supremacist as president.⁷ Headlines have been distracting my attention from what I originally presented at the Radical Collections conference; it's hard to know which conversations might still feel relevant when so much has been discussed this year about race and hatred in America. The website of The Racial Imaginary, an "interdisciplinary cultural laboratory," founded by poet Claudia Rankine, describes some of this moment:

The Institute begins with a focus on whiteness because we believe that in our current moment whiteness is freshly articulated: the volume on whiteness has been turned up. Whiteness as a source of unquestioned power, and as a "bloc," feels itself to be endangered even as it retains its hold on power. Given that the concept of racial hierarchy is a strategy employed to support white dominance, whiteness is an important aspect of any conversation about race. We begin here in order to make visible that which has been intentionally presented as inevitable so that we can move forward into more revelatory conversations about race. Our first project questions what can be made when we investigate, evade, beset and call out bloc-whiteness.⁸

As one of the most dangerous issues so often ignored, whiteness is part of what I would like to consider here. Or, echoing Michelle Caswell's work with LIS students, I'll focus on "identifying and dismantling" white supremacy in archives and libraries.⁹ I am mindful of my own position in writing this piece, or wary of such position.¹⁰ As a cis white heterosexual woman in a field filled with people like me, my desire is to confront whiteness and to use it to interrogate the past, or to better see the present. It feels precarious to suggest that collecting outright racist work might be part of anti-racist activism. But I am more concerned about not making this suggestion than making it; I worry that when librarians and archivists think about radical collections and leave out

⁶ Minnesota and Wisconsin, the two states I lived within up to the time I worked at the WHS, have been named the worst states for African Americans by ranking factors of homeownership, incarceration rates and unemployment by 24/7 Wall Street: <http://247wallst.com/special-report/2016/12/08/worst-states-for-black-americans-3/4/>

⁷ As Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, Trump's "ideology is white supremacy, in all its truculent and sanctimonious power." As in Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The First White President: The Foundation of Donald Trump's Presidency is the Negation of Barack Obama's Legacy," *The Atlantic*, October 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909>.

⁸ "About," The Racial Imaginary, <https://theracialimaginary.org/about>.

⁹ Michelle Caswell, "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives," *The Library Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (June 8, 2017): 222–35. <https://doi.org/10.1086/692299>.

¹⁰ Sociologist Jessie Daniels recently wrote a blog post ("How Naming My Family's White Supremacy Led Me to Change My Own Name.") about her decision to change her name after discovering that her grandfather had been a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Wanting to completely separate herself from this history while also studying white hate for her dissertation, her "waking nightmare was that someone would see me as one of those Night Riders, rather than their adversary." Daniels' worry speaks to my experiences in thinking about publishing this chapter, where I have worried over arguing to preserving the very things I most wish did not exist.

the terrors of the right, we (or the majority white people working in LIS) perpetuate structures of white power.

Although whiteness has been studied outside of library and Information Studies (LIS) for some time, librarians and archivists are now beginning to write about its influence on the field, and the ways that this concept can function in terms of power and culture.¹¹ Todd Honma, by way of George Lipsitz, describes whiteness as “a socio-cultural category constantly created and recreated as a way to uphold the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and opportunity.”¹² Honma also describes how normalized the hegemonic hold of whiteness has become, and that “...what counts as “universal” knowledge is an unquestioned and unacknowledged white perspective.” While dominant, whiteness is often described as an elusive subject, one that “never has to speak its name.”¹³ Gina Schlesselman-Tarango writes: “Because of its insistence on not naming itself, whiteness largely remains invisible (especially, it has been argued, by white subjects).”¹⁴ So much of the conversation in LIS echoes the work of the broader Black Lives Matter movement and what the Racial Imaginary describes: making visible that which has been assumed inevitable, that which went unidentified and unquestioned.

This chapter merges what I experienced in developing collections at the Wisconsin Historical Society with new scholarship on anti-racism and interrogations of whiteness in library and information studies (LIS).¹⁵ This is a personal exploration reconciling the whiteness of our profession with work that proposes breaks from the domination of whiteness.

Collecting Newspapers and Periodicals

While I worked at the Wisconsin Historical Society, its collections provided me with an eye-opening education in American culture. What I now think of as a true entry into American Studies involved reading periodicals by folks with hobbies like brick collecting, trade publications by cattle farmers, work written in prisons, and periodicals by and for many groups arguing for equality and liberation. In the Newspapers and Periodicals collection, the self-published, small run and radical print publications contain a spectrum of ideas that are hard to summarize in their vastness of opinion.¹⁶

Beyond the content of the collections, the practices of collection development used at the WHS were radical. Although official policies were left loose, Newspapers and Periodicals Librarian James P. Danky had a number of approaches for deciding what would be added to the

¹¹ Including even a full monograph, edited by Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science*, Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2017.

¹² 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), 5.

¹³ Honma, 15

¹⁴ Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, “The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (September 13, 2016): 669. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0015>.

¹⁵ I should also be clear that this chapter is really focused on collecting print publications for permanent collections, instead of attending to how hate groups use the internet, which feels like a very different conversation. For more on studying racism online, see: Jessie Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) and Safiya Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

¹⁶ The Wisconsin Historical Society holds the second largest collection of newspapers in the United States, after the Library of Congress. While I worked there, Newspapers and Periodicals held 9,000 active subscriptions.

collection.¹⁷ Those approaches have influenced my thinking in this chapter as well as my understanding of what it means to be a librarian working today. One of Danky's collection development approaches sought to be entirely comprehensive; the WHS aimed to collect every print serial publication produced within the state of Wisconsin. To this end, Danky encouraged everyone who produced work in print to bring or send a copy to the Society. He suggested to high school students studying zines to make their own, and to bring a copy to the WHS to be cataloged and preserved. He collected political pamphlets on the fly on the mall outside the Historical Society. He used an inter-library mail system to allow publishers in corners of the state to send materials to him without paying for postage.

Another significant collection area was harder to define. These were items I often heard referred to as "unique to OCLC," or materials that no other library had yet cataloged in WorldCat.¹⁸ These titles were grout and mortar; they filled in the spaces left by other libraries and archives. In adding these works, Danky was working on a larger scale of what had not yet been collected, searching against the whole of library holdings in the United States. Much of what I learned from Danky in this practice was the importance of questioning standard library practices, or specifically trying to see the negative space left behind by other libraries.¹⁹ Tactics for doing this work are encapsulated well in this story where Danky discovered barricades between the public library and the Haitian community in Miami. Here he describes visiting the public library:

I asked the library worker at the desk if she could tell me where I might find a listing of Haitian-American periodicals. She said there weren't any but I could try Thomas' Register. Since I had already subscribed to 3 titles from Miami while in Wisconsin, I knew this was not true... Deflated but not defeated, we drove 125 feet past the [library's] intersection and found the store [suggested by a local cab driver] where I bought 27 new titles while enjoying Haitian music videos played at full volume. Now 125 feet may not seem like much, but it was an insurmountable barrier between the public library and the surrounding community.²⁰

Danky was constantly working to bridge that 125 foot gap between what people read in the course of their lives and what they found on library shelves. He delighted in finding new and surprising materials, and paving a way not just for people to read them in Wisconsin but for

¹⁷ There has been enough interest in Danky's collecting that an issue of *Library Trends* was devoted to it: See issue 56, Number 3 of *Library Trends* for entire special issue about Danky and his varied collecting practices in many areas.

¹⁸ Cataloging statistics for the WHS from 2002 to 2006 show that 72% of the items added to the collection required original cataloging, or were not already held by another institution. Maija Salo-Cravens, email to the author, March 2-6, 2017.

¹⁹ I often think about the difference between what is held in the lobby of our libraries vs. what is preserved in our collections via this quote from Danky: "When you approach the security gates at the Madison, Wisconsin Public Library you encounter a large number of free distribution newspapers and magazines: shelter titles describing renting and real estate options; tabloid aimed at youth, especially music-related; a general-purpose alternative newsweekly; most wonderfully, the uncensored, satirical sheet titled *The Onion*; and small-format weeklies aimed at the Latino and Black communities...[these] publication[s], like so many, never made it past those security barriers. A wonderful example of librarians as gatekeepers." James Danky, "Libraries: They Would Have Been a Good Idea," in *Alternative Library Literature 1996-1997*, ed. Sanford Berman and James Danky (Jefferson, NC: Smallwood Press, 1998): 5.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

other libraries to likewise subscribe (and copy-catalog these Haitian-American titles after the WHS added them to WorldCat).

Both of these approaches--comprehensive local collecting and working into the empty spaces left by other collections--often brought us circling familiar realms and repeatedly adding work that it was clear challenged our fellow librarians. Unpolished and impolite work about sex, race, religion, or other topics that might make some uncomfortable to present to the public.

The Ron Paul Freedom Report

Take the *Ron Paul Freedom Report*. What I remember of this publication was that the title changed frequently. Yet Ron Paul's name always stayed emblazoned across the top of each newsletter in a large, bold header. Over the years it ranged from *Ron Paul's Freedom Report*, to *Ron Paul Political Report*, *The Ron Paul Survival Report*. I remember feeling confused when I held the newsletter—surviving *what*, exactly? The pieces were jumbled, the language was difficult to understand, but identifiably paranoid, hateful. Yet within the realm of materials collected at the WHS, it wasn't unusual—it sat within a spectrum of right-wing publications that seemed utterly inaccessible unless you were part of a very specific network.

During the run up to the 2008 U.S. Presidential elections, journalist James Kirchick wanted to write about Ron Paul's life before he became a candidate for president. Kirchick's inquiries led him to discover Paul had a long relationship to publishing newsletters:

In the age before blogs, newsletters occupied a prominent place in right-wing political discourse. With the pages of mainstream political magazines typically off-limits to their views (*National Review* editor William F. Buckley having famously denounced the John Birch Society), hardline conservatives resorted to putting out their own, less glossy publications. These were often paranoid and rambling--dominated by talk of international banking conspiracies, the Trilateral Commission's plans for world government, and warnings about coming Armageddon--but some of them had wide and devoted audiences.

On the *Freedom Report's* website, online issues only went back about a decade. Kirchick wrote, "Finding the pre-1999 newsletters was no easy task, but I was able to track many of them down at the libraries of the University of Kansas and the Wisconsin Historical Society."²¹

What Kirchick found in the copies of these newsletters he published in an article in *New Republic* in January of 2008.²² He summarized the contents as "decades worth of obsession with conspiracies, sympathy for the right-wing militia movement, and deeply held bigotry against blacks, Jews, and gays."²³ Although Paul has tried to distance himself from the newsletters and has claimed he was not responsible for writing any of the articles, the troubling content of these publications (and those headers bearing his name) have followed throughout his political career.²⁴

Although this example might not seem scalable—the practice of collecting hate tracts

²¹ James Kirchick, "Angry White Man," *New Republic*, January 8, 2008, <https://newrepublic.com/article/61771/angry-white-man>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Andy Kroll, "10 Extreme Claims in Ron Paul's Controversial Newsletters," *Mother Jones* Accessed October 15, 2017. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/01/ron-paul-newsletter-iowa-caucus-republican>.

probably won't stand in the way of electing more bigoted men—it does show the potential for accountability processes. Collecting white hate also makes it possible for scholars to study the nuances within; sociologist Jessie Daniels has described that she would not have been able to research white supremacy for her dissertation and first book without spending time in the Klanwatch Archive at the Southern Poverty Law Center.²⁵ Reflecting on the Paul controversy, historian Chip Berlet praised the WHS collections and Danky, asking: “Where else can you find a librarian who asks if the particular type of hate-group newsletter you are looking for is Ku Klux Klan, racial nationalist, neo-Nazi, Third Position, homophobic or Christian Identity?”²⁶ Although here it may sound like I'm arguing for all libraries or archives to collect and know these works as Danky did, I am actually only arguing for *enough*, and unscientifically so. Perhaps this collecting takes the form of gathering everything local, including the problematic, as with Wisconsin publications at the WHS. Or perhaps the collecting I am arguing for works into those harsh silences and those places no other collections have explored—it is easy to find these missing collections, even among histories we all know and reference frequently.

Documenting White Supremacist Violence

In her recent article, *Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional and Restorative Justice*, Tonia Sutherland summarizes what material objects were produced in the American South surrounding public lynchings, especially those events which were so large that they were advertised or ticketed. Calling lynching a “well-documented, pervasive, and ritual practice,” Sutherland notes that “despite a plethora of evidence... very little of this past is represented in American archives.” Although these material items that were created to commemorate these crimes still exist today, they aren't held in repositories. They “proliferate in online auctions and sales such as EBay,” mirroring other auctions of the black body in American history.²⁷

Critiquing archival amnesty, Sutherland concludes that it was wholly intentional for early twentieth century archivists to leave these “records of trauma” out of official archives, and further,

By failing to consistently collect this visual evidence as an intentional counter-narrative, American archives have effectively created a master narrative of normativity around Black death. In the silences of the gaps and vagaries that created the need for a social movement around #ArchivesForBlackLives, is the knowledge that tickets were sold to lynchings, that the mood of white mobs was exuberant—men cheering, women preening, children frolicking around the corpse as if it were a maypole...[that] special excursion trains carried people to lynchings from farms and outlying areas, [and that] some lynchings were staged like theater, the victims dressed in costumes to deepen their degradation.²⁸

²⁵ Jessie Daniels, *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

²⁶ Doug Moe, “Historical Society Reveals Ron Paul's Incendiary Past,” *Capital Times*, January 11, 2008, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1951978/posts>.

²⁷ Tonia Sutherland, “Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional Restorative Justice,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017). 1-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.42>

²⁸ *Ibid*, 13

Connecting permanence and oblivion to racial justice, Sutherland unites the current work of archivists with this troubled history of neglect. She asks: “Why have American archives—through appraisal and other practices—extended amnesty to perpetrators of hate by refusing to document human rights abuses?”²⁹ David Greetham has written similarly on the “cultural poetics of archival exclusion,” and argues that we preserve that which is an idealized version of our achievements as people united, rather than memories of Auschwitz, Passchendaele, Hiroshima or My Lai.³⁰

Following these claims from Sutherland and Greetham, I invite further exploration of how LIS professionals have conflated our collections with ourselves, or confused our collections with an idealized representation of ourselves. From the most horrifying histories of trauma on the scale of public lynchings or on the daily scale of microaggressions, can LIS professionals collect that which discomfords us? As Sutherland shows, librarians and archivists have chosen not to preserve white hate for fear of all that it represents or how it might contaminate. We’re fearful of the symbolism of inclusion.³¹

Inclusion in Collections

In her book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Sara Ahmed discusses how institutions become instituted over time. She examines what we accept as “second nature,” “how things are,” or background; “Accumulated and sedimented history” or “frozen history that surfaces as nature.”³² She writes, “Acts of naming, of giving buildings names, can keep a certain history alive: in the surroundings you are surrounded by who was there before. A history of whiteness can be a history of before.”³³ In a recent talk, Ahmed used the example of a building at the University College London still named for Francis Galton, a proponent of the eugenics movement. When pressed about continuing to uphold this legacy, the college’s provost claimed his only defense is that “I inherited him.”³⁴ I argue here that LIS is still wrestling with our inheritances, not yet seeing them as alterable. Christine Pawley writes, “Library collections themselves constitute a kind of legacy—one that successive generations of librarians inherit and tend to take for granted.”

Ahmed’s larger project has been to examine and challenge discourses surrounding diversity work in institutions. There have been many important articles written recently critiquing diversity discourses in LIS. David James Hudson recently critiqued the prevalent use of inclusion as the “defining anti-racist modality within LIS.” He disagrees with “a simplistic equation of racism with exclusion.”

²⁹ Ibid, 2

³⁰ David Greetham, “‘Who’s In, Who’s Out’: The Cultural Poetics of Archival Exclusion,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32 no. 1 (Spring 1999), 9.

³¹ In contrast to Caswell, Cifor and Ramirez’s work on representational belonging in community archives, or larger works on community involvement in the construction of their own histories, here I am following Sutherland to suggest that institutional archives and permanent collections in libraries can include the work of racists without empowering such ideas or inviting racists to be part of the project of the archive or permanent collection; that they would not hold power over how their work is arranged and described.

³² Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

³³ Ahmed, *On Being*, 38

³⁴ Ahmed, Sara. “The Institutional as the Usual: Diversity Work as Data Collection.” Lecture, Barnard Center for Research on Women, New York, NY, October 16, 2017.

From the standpoint of the diversity literature, in other words, racism is a problem because it segregates, shuts out, or ignores nonwhite people and perspectives. Regimes of racial subordination are far more multifaceted in their operations, however, and, far from exclusion, have frequently taken the form of integration, whether through assimilation, cooptation, or more complex strategies of inclusive control...To limit LIS anti-racism to a politics of inclusion and diversification leaves little room for asking deeper questions about the ways in which more fundamental assumptions and structures within the library world operate as sites for the perpetuation of white supremacy — the reproduction of white normativity and citizenry through public library programming, for example; the extension of racialized colonial narratives of Western civilizational superiority through the development logics of LIS global information inequality discourse; or the centering of a putatively benevolent heteronormative white femininity as the defining figure of North American library history.³⁵

When we contemplate all of the work that is housed within libraries and archives throughout America, we are certain to find a vast representation of works made by, for, and upholding whiteness. All too often when confronted with this realization of the stranglehold of whiteness of our collections, librarians respond by arguing for the inclusion of people of color, even at times using collections where they are unable to “diversify” staffing.³⁶

But how could current collecting displace all that we have inherited? How can we believe that adding the works of people of color solves issues of racial injustice in our profession? Especially knowing the barriers to publishing for people of color?³⁷

Ahmed spoke about being willing to dismantle the university in order to make it accommodate those who it was not originally built for (people of color, queer people, female-identified people). As she put plainly, “If talking about sexism and racism damages institutions, we need to damage institutions.”³⁸

In two recent pieces, Hudson discussed the distance from theory for library and archives professionals, and has tied theoretical thinking to issues surrounding race and white dominance in the profession.³⁹ He argues the profession remains undertheorized, but especially so in areas of broad social phenomenon, like race, whose “historical operations are complex, constantly shifting, and often contradictory where the methodologies upon which such inquiry turns tend to be dismissed, implicitly or explicitly, as impractical.”⁴⁰

Theory may be the thing that helps us damage our institutions, our libraries, their collections.

³⁵ 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 (January 31, 2017), 13. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i1.6>.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ See: Jody Nyasha Warner, “Moving Beyond Whiteness in North American Academic Libraries,” *Libri*, 51, no. 3 (2001): 167-72, doi:10.1515/libr.2001.167.

³⁸ Ahmed, “The Institutional”

³⁹ Hudson, “On Diversity,” and David James Hudson, “The Whiteness of Practicality,” In *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Studies*, edited by Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, 203-234. (Sacramento: Library Juice Press, 2017).

⁴⁰ Hudson, “On Diversity,” 26

Conclusion

*The time has come, God knows, for us to examine ourselves, but we can only do this if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here.*⁴¹

-James Baldwin

Because race is a construct, how we classify and define racism is a process that continually shifts. Thinking about the historical documentation of racism at the WHS allowed me to “lift the lid,” as Ahmed instructs, and has been important to my development as a librarian.⁴² Yet I don’t know if the work I did with Danky can inherently be understood to be anti-racist or significantly contributes to the fight against white supremacy. Or if these collections will shift in purpose as the larger WHS (and librarianship) ages and grows. Collecting the work of white supremacists might seem like the farthest thing from doing work toward racial justice, but I do feel that this work has connection to seeing beyond mythology and domination, that it is connected to bearing witness.

Michelle Caswell recently spoke about how her scholarship aims to interrogate and dismantle white supremacy. She feels the need to confront this issue as a white person.⁴³ I feel the same need, and this piece is an attempt to ask my white colleagues to examine their actions, for all LIS professionals to theorize (and re-theorize, revisit) collections, and to stand with those who have been targeted by racial violence.

I want to be clear that I have been arguing for documenting white hate in our collections, not welcoming it into our communities. I do believe that we can make such distinctions.⁴⁴ Here my arguments for collecting the work of white hate groups are know-your-enemy arguments, not free speech debates. I am not concerned with the supposed neutrality of LIS, nor “both sides” approaches to collecting where the left is balanced by the right—as if life could be so simple and binary. I am interested in discussing what happens to our work when we think of collections as potential sites of evidence, as ways of holding ourselves accountable, or lenses through which we might see structures of domination, beyond inclusion.

Finally, I want to wage support for healing justice.⁴⁵ Documenting white hate is not a project that one can endure full time, and my hope is that only enough institutions might engage in this work so that these conversations are adequately recorded but not glorified.

Why should we preserve works of hate that are difficult to comprehend? Because it was in the air around us. These views were shared; this violence happened. We can’t ignore it.

⁴¹ James Baldwin, “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American,” in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 11.

⁴² Ahmed, “The Institutional”

⁴³ Michelle Caswell, “Archivists Against History Repeating Itself: Towards a Liberatory Now,” Lecture, CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY, October 19, 2017.

⁴⁴ Unlike a recent social media post by a white librarian, I am not suggesting that by collecting works of white hate groups that we also perform outreach to them, allow them to meet in our public spaces, or for members of the alt-right to speak at our universities.

⁴⁵ See Patrice Cullor’s discussion of healing justice in her interview at: “Ruby Sales: Where Does It Hurt?” *On Being*. Podcast audio, Aug. 17, 2017. <https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt-aug2017/>.

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