Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

An Incomplete List of White Privileges in Archives and Action Items for Dismantling Them*

Content produced in Michelle Caswell’s Archives, Records, and Memory class, Fall 2016, UCLA
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*All of the following call for nuance, context, and an awareness that oppression is structural.
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**DESCRIPTION**

** PRIVILEGE **
When I look for materials from my community in archives, they will be described in the finding aid and catalog records using language we use to describe ourselves.

** ACTION **
- Train all archivists to have cultural humility and describe materials using anti-oppressive language.
- Educate yourself continually and constantly.
- Hire more archivists of color to describe materials.
- Engage communities to ask how they wish to describe themselves. Compensate them for their labor.

** PRIVILEGE **
When I look at descriptions of archival materials, I am not always bombarded by/reminded of my otherness.

** ACTION **
- Hire more archivists of color to describe materials.
- Update finding aids that use outdated white supremacist language. Keep a note of your changes so that users can examine the history of the finding aid as an artifact.
- Engage communities to ask how they wish to describe themselves. Compensate them for their labor.

** PRIVILEGE **
Materials are described using my native language.

** ACTION **
- Hire multilingual people as archivists and translators and translate finding aids into appropriate languages.
- Encourage, value, and give credit for language courses in MLIS programs and as continuing education.
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#### APPRAISAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIVILEGE</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
</tr>
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#### PRIVILEGE
- The objects I feel are valuable for my culture are also deemed valuable in archives.

#### ACTION
- Implement policies to collect materials representing and created by people of color. Note that it will take time to build trust and change racist trajectories.
- Contact archivists at your local repository and tell them you want to use collections created by people of color.
- Institute participatory appraisal models that share appraisal decision-making power with communities of color.

#### PRIVILEGE
- I can assume archives will be committed to the preservation of materials from my community.

#### ACTION
- Expand our cultural values to value materials created by communities of color.
- Educate yourself about what specific communities of color value.
- Demonstrate commitment to those communities through relationship building and power sharing over time.
- Learn and honor culturally specific protocols for what should be preserved or destroyed.
- Train and hire archivists of color so they are making appraisal decisions.

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*Source: Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives*
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**ACCESS/USE**

**PRIVILEGE**
I can use an archives without eliciting surveillance.

**ACTION**
▶ Fight like hell to maintain the privacy of users.
▶ Do not collect data that identifies users.
▶ Do not require users to show an ID to access collections.
▶ Do not treat users as thieves.

**PRIVILEGE**
When I go to the archives, I can be relatively sure that I will see someone of my race behind the reference desk.

**ACTION**
▶ Hire more archivists of color.
▶ Recruit more undergraduate students of color into MLIS programs to train to be archivists.
▶ Provide financial and moral support for MLIS students of color so that they complete their programs.

**PRIVILEGE**
When I go into an archive, no one questions why I am there.

**ACTION**
▶ Train staff at all levels to identify and disrupt white supremacist assumptions.
▶ Foster a nurturing environment for people of color in the reading room. Create displays and outreach materials that show your archives values communities of color.
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**PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

**PRIVILEGE**
People assume I’m unbiased because of my race.

**ACTION**
- De-center whiteness in archival practice. Name it. Uncover it. Discuss it. Address it.
- Intervene when you see whiteness perpetuated as a neutral default or assumption.
- Make your anti-racist values known and hold institutions accountable for the white supremacist values they perpetuate.
- Stop perpetuating the myth of archival neutrality.

**PRIVILEGE**
People assume I behave “professionally” because of my race.

**ACTION**
- Question assumptions about professionalism. Think critically about when those assumptions mask white supremacist values.
- Interrupt colleagues and users when they say racist things.
- Practice a phrase to have in your back pocket (such as “that’s racist!” or “would you say that about a white person?”) to disrupt racist comments.

**PRIVILEGE**
I can be sure funders will see the value of my collections rather than designate them as “niche.”

**ACTION**
- Communicate to funding agencies and allocators that their funding priorities often favor whiteness at the expense of people of color.
- Disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and making budgetary decisions.
- Uncover the whiteness of supposedly “universal” projects that do get funding. Name it. Discuss it. Address it.
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### EDUCATION

#### PRIVILEGE
I can be sure that archival practices and concepts from my culture will be represented in my education.

- Pluralize and decolonize archival education.
- Create syllabi that reflect authors and communities of color.
- Read and assign and cite scholars of color. Amplify their voices.
- Hold your professors accountable for disrupting white supremacy in the classroom.

#### PRIVILEGE
I can assume that when I attend an archival outreach or classroom instruction session, materials created by my community will be represented.

- Use materials created by communities of color in educational outreach activities.
- Create assignments based on them.
- Disrupt whiteness as a default or “neutral” category.
- Don’t assume users are not capable of understanding nuance and complexity about race. Address white supremacy in your instruction sessions.

#### PRIVILEGE
I can be sure there will be other students of my race in my classes. I can be sure there will be instructors of my race.

- Recruit more undergraduate students of color into MLIS programs to train to be archivists.
- Encourage students of color to pursue PhDs and become archival studies faculty.
- Provide financial and moral support for MLIS & PhD students of color so that they complete their programs.
- Hire archival studies faculty of color.
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