

Chapter 3

THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH LIBRARY'S WHITE PAST AND PRESENT

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Academic Libraries, Diversity, and Whiteness

The term *academic library* refers to a library that serves any type of post-secondary institution.¹ But because a great variety of such institutions exists, there is an equal variety of academic libraries as well. Even within the general subdivisions of community colleges, small liberal arts colleges, research universities, etc., there is a wide range of differences. As

1. As a usable definition for academic library, the American Library Association refers to that used by the National Center for Education Statistics, which defines an academic library “as the library associated with a degree-granting institution of higher education. Academic libraries are identified by the post-secondary institution of which they are a part and provide all of the following:

1. An organized collection of printed or other materials or a combination thereof;

2. A staff trained to provide and interpret such materials as required to meet the informational, cultural, recreational, or educational needs of clientele;

3. An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to clientele; and

4. The physical facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule.”

American Library Association, “Academic Libraries,” last accessed February 13, 2016, <http://www.ala.org/research/librarystats/academic>.

with United States education generally, the differences often have much to do with funding and endowments. They also have to do with history, tradition, status, location, public/private status, and more.

Many library workers move between these different spaces over the course of their careers. This has been true for me, even in my relatively brief time as a librarian, because my former place of work, the Ursula C. Schwerin Library of New York City College of Technology (CUNY), and Columbia University Libraries are different in almost every way. These two libraries and their host institutions present obvious differences in terms of wealth (with correspondingly large differences in tuition and resources), physical size, and reputation or public perception, to name just a few. Another major difference is the composition of the student bodies.²

Librarianship has long been one of the whitest professions, and the demographics of librarianship have hardly shifted over the last generation. Recently, more people have questioned publicly why programs intended to increase diversity in the profession have failed to make a significant difference (though their absence would presumably make things much worse).³ Librarianship has “a whiteness problem,” Chris

2. For statistics on the demographics of the two institutions, see, for City Tech: Charlie Edwards, Jody Rosen, Maura Smale, and Jenna Spevack, “Building a Place for Community: City Tech’s OpenLab,” *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy* no. 5 (May 2014), <http://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/building-a-place-for-community/>; and for Columbia: “Columbia University Headcount Enrollment by School, Race/Ethnicity, and Citizenship, Fall 2015,” last accessed May 15, 2016, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/opir/abstract/opir_enrollment_ethnicity_1.htm.

3. See Annie Pho and Turner Masland, “The Revolution Will Not Be Stereotyped: Changing Perceptions Through Diversity,” in *The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions and Presentations of Information Work*, ed. Nicole Pagowsky and Miriam Rigby (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2014), 257-82; Angela Galvan, “Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and 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 Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (October 2015), <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/>; Jennifer Vinopal, “The Quest for Diversity in Library Staffing: From Awareness to Action,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (January 2016),

Bourg has bluntly reminded us.⁴ But this problem is not limited to professional staff demographics. Areas such as collections, cataloging and description, and public programming and exhibitions have shown a similar stubborn resistance to change, even though they have been addressed in many ways, for a long time.⁵

This chapter will consider a less-often mentioned aspect of whiteness in libraries and librarianship. It will examine the ways in which the physical space of the library may inscribe, overdetermine, and perpetuate the library as a white space. The specific prompt for this exploration was the library building in which I work every day. Its marked contrast with my previous library in terms of age, aesthetics, size, and complexity has encouraged me to consider the connections between physical space and the whiteness of the library experience and librarianship. I look at the library not only as a place where people (students, faculty, and staff) work, study, and gather, but as a distinct(ive) part of the university, one which preserves, reproduces, and transmits certain values and regimes of knowledge. I also try to foreground the ways in which a library may be designed to foreclose certain uses, or certain groups, from asserting their agency, or even being. Reflecting on this dimension of the library will show that even if we were to remedy our longstanding diversity and whiteness problems in terms of personnel or staff, we would still find

<http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/quest-for-diversity/>.

4. 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/>.

5. See for example Hope Olson, *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002); K. R. Roberto, ed., *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008); Christine Pawley, "Hegemony's Handmaid? The Library and Information Studies Curriculum from a Class Perspective," *Library Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1998): 123-44, doi: 10.1086/602955; Wayne Wiegand, "Tunnel Vision and Blind Spots: What the Past Tells Us about the Present; Reflection on the Twentieth-Century History of American Librarianship," *Library Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (Jan. 1999), 1-32, doi: 10.1086/603022; and Emily Drabinski, "Queering Library Space: Notes Toward a New Geography of the Library," in *Thinking Critically: Alternative Perspectives and Methods in Information Studies, 2008 Conference Proceedings*, ed. E. Buchanan and C. Hansen (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2008), 30-37.

ourselves in spaces of whiteness and spaces that reproduce whiteness. In concluding, I will suggest some pedagogical implications of these observations about space, because I believe that library classrooms, along with reference and consultation spaces, are the most important sites of resistance to entrenched structures of oppression in the library.

The Library as a White Space

In recent years, several librarians and library and information science (LIS) scholars have sought to better understand why it is that most librarians are white, and especially why higher administration in libraries is even whiter (and more male).⁶ Less often referenced in these writings (which often focus on hiring, retention, and other personnel issues) is how our libraries physically organize, represent, and construct knowledge in ways that reproduce whiteness and white supremacy. We have sophisticated critiques that show how cataloging practices, collection development policies, and the allocation of resources work to reproduce structural oppression and inequalities.⁷ Gina Schlesselman-Tarango has reminded us that we have to take an intersectional approach to understanding whiteness in librarianship since it has historically (at least since the early 20th century) been the white female librarian who has been the representative and bearer of white supremacy in the library.⁸ Likewise, Fobazi Ettarh urges us to move beyond the simplistic binary of white vs. nonwhite and learn to practice an intersectional librarianship

6. Bourg, "Whiteness, Social Justice, and the Future of Libraries"; Hathcock, "White Librarianship in Blackface"; Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias."

7. See for example Christine Pawley, "Unequal Legacies: Race and Multiculturalism in the LIS Curriculum," *Library Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2006), 149-68, doi: 10.1086/506955.

8. Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, "The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library" (presentation, Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies Colloquium, University of Toronto, Canada, October 18, 2014), <http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=library-publications>.

instead.⁹ Others have talked about how a library can be perceived as a white space for those acculturating into a white or white-dominated society. Fiona Blackburn has addressed this with respect to the question of “competence” in Australian libraries.¹⁰ Freeda Brook, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazzaro address various aspects of whiteness in the library beyond personnel, and consider especially “the physical spaces of service delivery, public services staff, and service delivery methods and values.”¹¹ They also address the whiteness of architecture and spatial organization. This chapter is mainly concerned with that specific aspect, as well as how the library itself, physically—and maybe even metaphysically—is a *white place*. Is the library, by definition, a white place? Or can only some be identified as such, and what is it specifically that makes them white spaces?

I use the term whiteness as it was developed by critical race theory and critical whiteness studies. Stated very succinctly, I understand whiteness to be a socially constructed classification or status conferred upon certain people (whose identity has been in flux throughout history) enjoying a wide range of privileges, advantages, and comforts that any group or individual deemed nonwhite is not automatically granted. Most crucially for my considerations here, whiteness is a status that sets the standard for normality and reality itself (at least in much of North America and Europe). Deviations from whiteness are usually perceived as disruptions, disturbances, subversions, or offenses. Hence a telltale sign of whiteness is the policing of its borders, both literal and figurative. Because the vast majority of white people in Europe and North America live within the sphere of whiteness (again, literally and figuratively, physically

9. Fobazi Ettarh, “Making a New Table: Intersectional Librarianship,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (July 2014), <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/making-a-new-table-intersectional-librarianship-3/>.

10. Fiona Blackburn, “The Intersection Between Cultural Competence and Libraries,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (December 2015), <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/culturalcompetence/>.

11. 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.

and psychologically), they are usually unaware, or unable to recognize, the very category of their privileged status. This includes a long list of unearned privileges famously outlined by Peggy McIntosh.¹²

Architectural theorist Craig Wilkins, who writes about whiteness and space, has elaborated on this: “For white people, race functions as a large ensemble of practices and rules that provide all sorts of small and large advantages in life. As such, whiteness is the source of many privileges and, to mask its benefits, whiteness is often discursively hidden within concepts like neutrality or universality.”¹³ In Wilkins’s description, “whiteness studies reveals and illuminates the construction of a social framework in which assumptions, judgments, and decisions are made that generally support the image of all things white as the normative and anything non-white as the anomaly. The unquestioned assumption of neutrality in what is in truth a carefully constructed social view inevitably renders people of color not necessarily criminal, but suspect, for no other reason than being different, than for not being white.”¹⁴ The close association of whiteness and neutrality should be a red flag for anyone who works in critical librarianship and critical library pedagogy, as neutrality endures as one of the values of librarianship that we challenge and question in our work, and which continues to be defended vigorously by many of our colleagues.¹⁵

A few scholars working in LIS have used the framework provided by critical whiteness studies to analyze the ways that librarianship has

12. 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>.

13. Craig Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture, and Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 10.

14. *Ibid.*, 11.

15. See the introduction (1-7) and contributions to Alison Lewis, ed., *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* (Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2008); see also Candise Branum, “The Myth of Library Neutrality,” (2008), <https://candisebranum.wordpress.com/2014/05/15/the-myth-of-library-neutrality/>; Madison Sullivan, “Librarianship Doesn’t Need Professionals,” *ACRLlog* (blog), January 19, 2016, <http://acrl.org/2016/01/19/professionalism/>.

helped perpetuate white supremacy. This work, in addition to the present volume, shows that there is a growing interest in pursuing whiteness studies in LIS. However, given the relatively large volume of work in critical librarianship and information literacy over the past decade or more, it is surprising that there hasn't been more. Todd Honma makes this point in an important and frequently-cited article.¹⁶ He observes that much of LIS continues to operate as though the scholarship on race and race studies doesn't exist.¹⁷ He writes that libraries have always been designed and operated with a "distinctively racial motive" that has been left unanalyzed.¹⁸ In general, he says, "libraries have historically served the interests of a white racial project by aiding in the construction and maintenance of a white American citizenry as well as the perpetuation of white privilege in the structures of the field itself."¹⁹ In a footnote he makes the crucial point that "whiteness in its various forms needs to be recognized, deconstructed, and reinterpreted in order for the field to advance and for scholars and practitioners to recognize the problematic nature of race and librarianship in the United States."²⁰ Five years before Honma, Isabel Espinal called upon her colleagues in LIS to take up the study of whiteness. She noted that "unless we address whiteness, unless we identify and name it, many of the problems that plague us collectively and as individual librarians of color will continue."²¹ Her words have proven to be true: fifteen years later the problems are indeed still present. Espinal suggests that "the traditional North American library

16. 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>.

17. *Ibid.*, 1.

18. *Ibid.*, 4.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 21, note 3.

21. 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): 133.

institution is an example of a white institution and white public space.”²² It is this point that I will now take up.

Columbia’s Butler Library as a White Space

Wilkins argues that whiteness “becomes embedded in the foundation of, and is critical to, the determination of desirable space, place, and property.”²³ This observation should make us think carefully about the space, place, and property of the library. In the United States (and elsewhere), when we talk about library space, it is important to recognize the very close relationship between place, space, and race throughout history. This relationship is one of the most important aspects of the history of Columbia University. Geographically, the key sociological and historical feature of Columbia’s main campus (since the late 1890s) is its proximity to Harlem. As a predominantly white institution for much of its history, its enmeshment with inarguably one of the most important African American places from the 1920s onward helps spotlight the problematic relationship of race and space for the university.

Columbia’s fraught relationship with Harlem played out most dramatically in April 1968. As on many campuses across the country, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. helped spark student protests against university policies and practices. Specifically, students demanded a halt to the university’s plans to build a gymnasium in Morningside Park, whose very name in some ways reflected the uneasy relationship between town and gown. The neighborhood surrounding the university acquired the name Morningside Heights only in the early- to mid-twentieth century. It was never given this name officially.²⁴ The usage became more standardized as Harlem became a more identifiably black neighborhood.

22. *Ibid.*, 137.

23. Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity*, 17.

24. Andrew Dolkart, *Morningside Heights: A History of its Architecture and Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Since Morningside Park, which separates the campus from Harlem proper, shares the same name as the neighborhood, the university may have assumed that the park belonged to it, rather than to the residents of Harlem. As Stefan Bradley writes, “the university assumed that the neighboring communities, mostly black and Puerto Rican, did not have the power to stop Columbia. This . . . belief was based on several premises, including paternalism, white privilege, and class privilege.”²⁵

The events of 1968 had deep roots. Columbia’s history as an elite institution going back to colonial America means that it was intimately connected to slavery, as Craig Wilder has chronicled.²⁶ Until the 1960s, Columbia had enrolled almost no African American students. These factors, and the characteristics of its geography and space (which obviously includes the university libraries), speak to a long history of demarcation and exclusion. To put it succinctly, the university has its own specific history of colonization, and even today under the guise of expansion and gentrification, that colonization—at least to many in the community—continues. For much of its existence, including the period when its library buildings and library collections were built, the institution was very much perceived as exclusively white by those in the surrounding community, and especially by the very small number of students of color who attended.²⁷ What may be missed or ignored is the fact that the university’s great libraries are a part of that history in more ways than we might realize.

25. Stefan M. Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 1. Bradley recounts the history of Columbia’s plans to build a gymnasium in Morningside Park, as well as the university’s long history of strained relations with surrounding communities of color. He explains that one of the main reasons for the success of the protest was because of the leadership of the Students’ Afro-American Society, which grew out of the significant, though still very small, black presence on campus.

26. Craig S. Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

27. See Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University*, 10-11.

The Library Building: Inside and Out

The first physical fact of any library to be noted is most likely its architecture. While we may be accustomed to bland and utilitarian public architecture, many people, perhaps especially librarians, want library architecture to project something essential to a library's purpose. But if we consider library architecture and aesthetics from the perspective of race, our perception can change. Brook, Ellenwood and Lazzaro explicitly note that many library patrons perceive a link between classical or medieval-style architecture and the imposition of whiteness and white hegemony.²⁸ Although many people might associate the library, especially the academic library, with these styles, much of contemporary library architecture since the mid-twentieth century is built in a modernist or postmodernist design. But the association of European classical and medieval architecture with libraries and higher learning in general persists, partly as a romanticized vision of academia, but also because of an association with elitism, exclusivity, and class distinction.²⁹ Scholars such as nina de jesus rightly link the mission of the modern library (especially the academic library) with the European Enlightenment and its racist and colonialist legacies. When a library (or a university) is built in styles deliberately evoking European precedents, it places the space within a certain tradition. It also links the building with other structures that share a similar style: courts, government buildings of various kinds, etc. These structures are meant to invoke and/or promote power, often the power of the state, as Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro observe, but in this case it is the power of (elite) knowledge and perhaps of the

28. Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro, "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice," 14-17.

29. See for example nina de jesus's illustration in her article on oppressive library structures, of the very classical Queens Hall, State Library of Victoria, which she captions simply, 'oppressive institution.' 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/>.

institution as well. We should remind ourselves that this is another way that libraries are never neutral.³⁰

Butler Library has earned more than its share of notoriety for particular architectural features that seem to promote (or imply) patriarchy, elitism, classism, and racism.³¹ While it is fairly common for a research university library to occupy a central position on campus, at Columbia this is very prominently the case. At first glance, there appear to be two massive libraries facing each other in the center of campus. The original library, built in 1897 and still called Low Memorial Library, simply has: "The Library of Columbia University" chiseled into its frieze. Its 1934 replacement, Butler Library, sits directly across from it. This placement sends a message, perhaps not so loud and clear as it once was, that the library is the main repository and source of knowledge and enlightenment, the core of the university's identity, and an equal counterweight, or complement perhaps, to the university administration which has been housed in Low ever since the library left. Columbia's leaders (specifically its long-serving president Nicolas Murray Butler, after whom the library was renamed and a large painting of whom adorns the main staircase of the building) wanted to make this abundantly clear, so instead of simply proclaiming the building as the library of the university, they had the names of famous white male writers, ancient and modern, chiseled

30. Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro, "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice," 254-56. Of course, adopting a bland and utilitarian style of contemporary architecture does not magically produce a neutral and equitable space. Such buildings are just as capable of being ableist, racist, sexist, and colonialist, arguably even more so because modernism often projects a universality or neutrality even more aggressive than classical or medieval architecture. On racism, sexism, ableism, and architecture, see Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity*; see also Leslie Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-made Environment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Paulette Rothbauer, "Locating the Library as Place among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Patrons," in *The Library as Place: History, Community, and Culture*, ed. John E. Buschman and Gloria Leckie (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007), 101-16.

31. Jeffrey Bellin, "It's Time to Renovate Butler," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, March 25, 1994, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19940325-01.2.11&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

along the upper and lower friezes of the façade.³² The most prominent names along the upper frieze all belong to men from the Greco-Roman West European tradition. The lower frieze of names spells out the names of exclusively US American white male writers. The practice of permanently putting the names of canonical Western writers on the facades of libraries was not Columbia's invention, nor is it unique to Columbia. It reflects a moment in early- to mid-twentieth century American history when the concept of "Western civilization" was codified through a canon of literary and artistic works. This reflects the values of the ruling elite of Protestant white men in the United States, and reveals both their sense of historical destiny and racial superiority. Not coincidentally, the period also witnessed the rise of white supremacist ideologies, scientific racism, official anti-Semitism, and anti-immigrant legislation that closed the country to most nonwhite peoples.

To enter the library requires that one process all of this information, though one can choose to ignore it if one tries.³³ Once inside, however, visitors find themselves in a much more intimate space. Apart from the large main reading room, the spaces of the library vary in size. Most are small, and some of them are perhaps even claustrophobic. In many ways, the library functions extremely well as the multi-purpose, flexible institution that many college libraries strive to be today. It is not the uni-functional or rigid space that Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro critique as oppressively white. Yet, the modest grandeur of its entrance and main staircase do project, in a quiet way perhaps, a message about

32. Butler, for much of his lifetime a well-known and ubiquitous figure in the United States and abroad, is not much recognized or remembered today. But from the perspective of Columbia's history he made a profound and lasting impact, not least on the university's libraries. See Michael Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous: The Amazing Career of the Redoubtable Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

33. Students may try, but once they have gazed at the names, it can be hard for them to shake the impression made by those names. See for example one student's reactions: Kara Schechtman, "A Man is but What He Knoweth: Coming to Terms with Butler," *Columbia Daily Spectator* (April 26, 2016), <http://columbiaspectator.com/eye/2016/04/26/man-what-he-knoweth-coming-terms-butler>.

learning, knowledge, and research. The main staircase reminds the visitor of the university's past: a portrait of Dwight D. Eisenhower when he was president of the university; a huge painting of a ceremony in Low Library honoring a visit of King George VI (the last Emperor of India) and Queen Elizabeth in 1939; a portrait of Butler; and a huge portrait by Joshua Reynolds of George Grenville, a British Prime Minister during the reign of George III.³⁴ Visitors might simply describe the effect of these paintings as stuffy, or they might find them aesthetically appealing or providing a sense of history to the place. But such images can also be interpreted and absorbed, both consciously and unconsciously, as emblems of the library's whiteness (and maleness). By the time one has reached the third floor, where the main entrance to the stacks is located (and where reference and research services and instruction are found), a message has been delivered. It is a message that is not unique to this library, or to libraries specifically, but it is one that a library truly committed to inclusivity should try to modify.

These observations about the whiteness of my library are prompts to consider ways in which the library might become something other than (primarily) white. In what sense can it become a place not of oppression or the (re)imposition of one group's hegemony, but one that actively works towards becoming a place of freedom, liberation, and justice? Bourq writes that "libraries ought to be the places on campus where community members, students especially, feel the most free to talk about difficult topics, to express and explore the full range of opinions and ideas on the highly charged topics that are part of their social world."³⁵ I think that most of my colleagues share a commitment to this goal for our libraries, including and perhaps especially Butler. This is a part of the transformation I envision, but it would be more than this.

34. When the painting was donated by an alumnus in 1962, a university administrator commented that the work "fits superbly into the setting and tradition of Columbia University." See "Reynolds Portrait Given to Columbia," *Columbia Daily Spectator* 107, no. 44 (December 10, 1962), <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19621210-01.2.16&e=---en-20--198--txt-txIN-gopstein---->.

35. Bourq, "Whiteness, Social Justice, and the Future of Libraries."

Bourg also recommends that we “educate and motivate those [of] us in leadership positions to start to work on the structural and systemic issues.”³⁶ I also advocate for this, but I would add that librarians such as myself, who are not in leadership positions but who are nonetheless privileged in many ways within the library, the institution, and society at large, can do many things to work on the structural and systemic issues in the things we do every day: collecting, consulting, liaising, and teaching. It is through these activities, in part, that we can call attention to the ways in which we work under specific structural constraints that prevent us from becoming that place of freedom, liberation, and justice we pretend or seek to be.

Pedagogical Implications

Even though an academic research library has abundant resources, and students may come prepared to do research there, the legacies and continued distortions of the information and research landscape that our libraries produce, in addition to the problematic spaces in which research takes place, actually demand *more* attention, not less. Library instruction is an opportunity to expose and to challenge the whiteness of the library, in both its external (architectural and design) and internal (collections and services) manifestations. A critical library pedagogy that acknowledges students as producers of knowledge may be the best challenge to inherited oppressive structures that literally surround students when they walk into the library. George Yancy, following bell hooks, embraces such “a liberatory education . . . that encourages excitement and transgression.”³⁷ Yancy has taken hooks’ wisdom and applied it to the teaching of philosophy, which he calls “one of the most elitist and

36. Ibid.

37. George Yancy, “Engaging Whiteness and the Practice of Freedom: The Creation of Subversive Academic Spaces,” in *Critical Perspectives on bell hooks*, ed. Maria del Guadalupe Davidson and George Yancy (Florence: Routledge, 2009), 40.

whitest of subjects.”³⁸ Yancy writes that “the ethos of the banking system of education in the United States . . . is complicit with the prolongation of uncritical practices of liberation that sustain the hegemony of whiteness.”³⁹ He reminds us that most white students who enter the classroom “have come to identify whiteness with what it means to be human or what it means to be American or simply a person.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the names on the frieze of Butler Library reinforce this belief. Admittedly, as in so many other areas, the library classroom is a very limited venue for pursuing social justice, if for no other reason than our limited time. Yancy notes that “white students have learned to cut whiteness off from its historical formation, its colonial history, its history of terror, and its current hegemonic practices. Hence, whiteness, in their eyes, is incidental to their identity.”⁴¹ So it might be challenging, to the say the least, to open their eyes to the whiteness of the library that surrounds them. This can be done by engaging white students and students of color alike in a conversation about library space. All students should share their reactions and impressions of the library’s spaces and how they perceive their places in them. This might bring to the surface some of the differences in their relationships to library space that are either assumed or unspoken. In this way, the library classroom could potentially provide the opportunity to focus on all of the dimensions of the whiteness problem in the library context: our lack of diversity among librarians, our racist and colonialist cataloging practices, our biased and limited collections, our flawed pedagogies, and our white spaces. Here is where we can all really get to work.

38. *Ibid.*, 49.

39. *Ibid.*, 43.

40. *Ibid.*, 44.

41. *Ibid.*, 47.

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