

# Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

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

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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- ▶ Update finding aids that use outdated white supremacist language.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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## 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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## APPRAISAL

### PRIVILEGE

I can be sure I can find materials representing people of my race/ created by people of my race.

### 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

The objects I feel are valuable for my culture are also deemed valuable in archives.

### ACTION

- ▶ Expand our cultural values to value materials created by communities of color.
- ▶ Educate yourself (continually, constantly) about what specific communities of color value. Don't expect communities of color to do the work for you.
- ▶ Work collaboratively with communities of color as equal partners in appraisal decisions. Compensate them for their labor.

### PRIVILEGE

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

### ACTION

- ▶ 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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## 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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## EDUCATION

### PRIVILEGE

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

### ACTION

- ▶ 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.

### ACTION

- ▶ 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.

### ACTION

- ▶ 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.