

# INTRODUCTION TO PART II: THE COURAGE OF CHARACTER AND COMMITMENT VERSUS THE COWARDLINESS OF COMFORTABLE CONTENTMENT

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The nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage they did not know they had.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

## THOUGHTFULNESS

Let me open this brief introductory essay for “Part II: Illuminating Erasure,” with acknowledgement and appreciation. To create and operate outside the comfort zones of conventional acceptance takes an uncommon level of strength, courage, and conviction. To then organize and collaborate with others to *center* a much-needed discourse from a historically consistent starting point too often existing at the outer margins of inclusive participatory discourse is more than activism or intellectual contribution. It more certainly is a highly spiritual journey. In organizing this endeavor, the volume’s editors, Sofia Leung and Jorge López-McKnight, exemplify the relentless courage and tenacity to be the type of advocates and academic warriors necessary to lead a Critical Race Theory (CRT) endeavor in library and information science (LIS) and archival studies.

As the subjects and terminology of equity, privilege, inclusion, whiteness, social justice, and, yes, Critical Race Theory become less exotic, gradually more normative, and make their way into the LIS and archival nomenclature, it is clear this volume of collected critical works is destined to become the foundational seminal

primer for those seeking illumination and inspiration regarding the application of CRT. In these pages the editors initiate the critical-cultural communication essential in forming an academic solidarity, which, in turn, can challenge and substantively disrupt White Supremacy and hypersegregation in LIS and archival studies (Rodino-Colocino 2016).

People who are truly strong lift others up. People who are truly powerful bring others together.  
—Michelle Obama

## REFLECTION

While humbled to participate, I am also led to be a bit reflective about my personal journey and evolution in becoming a critical race theorist in LIS and archival studies. Reading the chapters of this collective volume is an emotionally conflicted experience. Best stated, it is a Frankie Beverly experience—an experience captured in the lyrics of the R&B classic “Joy and Pain” (Beverly 1981).<sup>1</sup>

In pursuit of my master’s of education at the University of Utah, I was able to engage with both scholars of color and white scholars whose work is grounded in critical social consciousness. However, it was the “Joy and Pain” experiences of pursuing and ultimately attaining my MLIS and PhD at the University of California Los Angeles that led me to author the first CRT article in a peer-reviewed information science journal (Dunbar 2006).

Being blessed to have CRT icons Daniel Solórzano and Kimberlé Crenshaw on my dissertation committee is a clear moment of academic joy, which is juxtaposed to the very real emotional pain of being personally targeted with institutional racism at both the departmental and university levels. Reading this groundbreaking volume brings me back to the conflicting sentiments I stated in the acknowledgements of my dissertation over a decade ago (Dunbar 2008). It is my UCLA experiences along with subsequent higher education and professional librarianship experiences inundated with White Supremacy, nonetheless, which make the creation of and contribution to CRT work in LIS and archival studies a form of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).<sup>2</sup>

## PERSPECTIVE AT THE LEVEL OF SOCIETY

Let me offer some perspective. Any phenomenon that is deeply rooted, sustained, transcending, and unyielding at the meta level of society inevitably permeates

throughout most, if not all, human interactions at the subcultural level of society (Landman and Carvalho 2016, 24–25; Roberts 2020). Such is the case when examining the societal realities of White Supremacy and premeditated segregation in the United States. The threads of White Supremacy and segregation are interwoven in the entire fabric of American life and culture (Christian 2002; Rothstein 2017). In fact, the current American racial climate can quite possibly be characterized as a unique iteration of apartheid—in this instance, forming a twenty-first-century version of what is often discussed as neo-apartheid. That said, the more accurate truth of the matter is that the realities of economic, health, political, and educational disparities along racial lines, coupled with hypergeographic segregation, have a centuries-long legacy in the United States of America (Krysan and Crowder 2017; Massey and Fischer 2003; Rashid 2011).

Obviously, there is very little that is new when there are constants that have held true over centuries. In the traditional model of apartheid, the systems of oppression are control mechanisms when the white population is the overwhelming minority group, as in South Africa. Madlingozi frames neo-apartheid as a means to call attention to the post-1994 constitutional rearrangements, which offer minimal departure from the inherited and bifurcated social configuration of the past (Madlingozi 2017).<sup>3</sup>

In applying the neo-apartheid framework to the US, one could easily argue that the structural tenets of apartheid have either been at the point of development and emergence or have been well in place over the last 400 years (Malcom 2019). The “neo,” or divergence from traditional apartheid model of South Africa, is that US neo-apartheid has the legacy with all the “bifurcated social configuration of the past”—namely, White Supremacy and hypersegregation—while whites have been the majority population.

It is projected that at some point close to 2040, there will be no racial majority in the country (Frey 2015). Without a substantive shift in the bifurcated economic, educational, political, and social configurations of the United States over the next couple of decades, the possibility of an authentic form of diversity will disappointingly give way to America’s legacy of White Supremacy and hypersegregation, enabling the removal of the “neo” in neo-apartheid and leaving the US less than twenty-five years away from being simply an apartheid nation. It would be well beyond naïve to consider that as White Supremacy and segregation are interwoven into the entire fabric of American life and culture, that accordingly the very same fabric is not also clothing the professional practices and intellectual expressions in LIS and archival studies.

## PERSPECTIVE AT THE DISCIPLINARY LEVEL

Thoroughly articulating the full infiltration of White Supremacy and apartheid-level segregation at the societal level allows for the discussion of the existence and impact of the destructive dynamic duo of White Supremacy and segregation in information-based discourses. Moreover, the need for critical race frameworks as a deconstruction tool of White Supremacy and segregation in LIS and archival studies becomes apparent, if not obvious. The over thirty-five-year legacy and success of CRT in challenging multiple forms of oppression like White Supremacy and segregation in disciplines such as education, ethnic studies, gender studies, law, queer studies, and sociology bodes well for the ability of critical race frameworks to assist in confronting White Supremacy and segregation in information-based discourses. If CRT is to be used as a tool to deliver on the possibilities and opportunities for equity, inclusion, and social justice in LIS, then we need the professors, practitioners, and professionals of the field to follow the example of courage of character and commitment set by the authors of this section and strive for knowledge justice by disrupting LIS through CRT.

No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.

—Alice Walker

## THE WORK

The authors in this section, Natarajan, Walker, Lugo Vázquez, and Inefuku, honorably uphold the CRT legacy by creating lenses that make apparent the very nuanced micro- and systemic macroaggressions that are too often ignored and thus reduced to virtual invisibility against the backdrop of whiteness and White Supremacy.<sup>4</sup> The contributions in this section utilize well some of the now iconic CRT tools, such as Crenshaw's intersectionality, Delgado's counternarrative/counterstory as expressed through the work of Yosso and Solórzano, Pierce's microaggression, the deconstruction of white privilege and White Supremacy, and Collins's domains of -power framework and the idea that value neutrality actually exists. There certainly will be inspirations and future aspirations that manifest from the scholarship in this section, based on the authors' rigorous and responsible use of the CRT tools that, in most cases, have already been introduced to LIS. Moreover, the contributions of Natarajan, Lugo Vázquez, and Inefuku also present opportunities to introduce to the CRT in LIS discourse additional CRT tools that have not been as substantively present in previous LIS literature.

In "Counterstoried Spaces and Unknowns: A Queer South Asian Librarian Dreaming," Natarajan shares an essay of personal reflection through a lens constructed

with the CRT frameworks of community cultural wealth, intersectionality, and Queer of Color Critique. Through Vani's lens—featuring the intersectionalities of second-generation South Asian American, queer, femme, nonbinary, and person of color marginalization; sexual oppression; misrepresentation; homophobia; transphobia; and racism—we clearly see the multilayers of exclusions ranging from micro-moments of relatively naïve expressions of racism by library professionals and professors to the accumulative macro power of a society *ignoring* the actual viable cultural aspects of a community *into near invisibility*. Natarajan deconstructs the whiteness of their personal experiences.

That said, the author also breathes life into understanding White Supremacy as a neo-apartheid experience, one fraught with near-debilitating segregation of them as an individual and the identities they represent. We can also consider this contribution's added value in its ability to illustrate post-traumatic growth as a CRT tool (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).<sup>5</sup> Vani successfully administers a self-therapeutic process of resilience and locating community to move beyond the moments of traumatic segregation to a vibrant expression and experience of post-traumatic growth, thus snatching victory from the jaws of victimization.

I'm writing my story so that others might see fragments of themselves.

—Lena Waithe

In “Ann Allen Shockley: An Activist-Librarian for Black Special Collections,” Shaundra Walker powerfully delivers what CRT counterstories should be expected to deliver—that is, a glimpse into the strength and struggle of the protagonist. Walker, in this instance, offers the story of Ann Shockley, a Black activist-librarian who while unique in her advocacy for special collections in libraries serving historically Black colleges and universities, was also representative of “a continuum of Black activist-librarians.” If we consider equity as one the primary goals of CRT scholarship and activism, then intellectual acceptance and acknowledgement should certainly be the gold standard for pursuits of equity. As Walker clearly states, Black special collections, particularly those developed at and through institutions of higher learning, are viable and vibrant expression of “Black intellectual legacies.” Shaundra's presentation of Ann Shockley's story stands as a considerable contribution to CRT work in LIS and will most certainly lead to additional opportunities, which bring equity to the intellectual work conducted by People of Color. In turn, the social justice possibilities inspired by this work move from substantial to exponential.

We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers.

—Bayard Rustin

The architecture of Sujei Lugo Vázquez's contribution is grounded in Patricia Hill Collins's notion of racism having four domains of power, as articulated in *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, Schools, the Media and Democratic Possibilities* (Collins 2009). What Lugo Vázquez builds on Collins's infrastructure of the structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal domains is an authentic challenge to LIS broadly and to children's librarianship more specifically. The challenge is to address the often-ignored permanence of racism embedded in the institution of librarianship, expressed by the absence of People of Color as a topic in children's collections, as well as People of Color as authors. The fine craftsmanship of Sujei's scholarship is showcased in the detailed historical reflections, which include both the history of exclusion and the legacy (1921–1972) of counterstorytelling library activists, including Augusta Braxston Baker, Pura T. Belpré, Charlemae Hill Rollins, Effie Lee Morris, and Lotsee Patterson. Lugo Vázquez's CRT contribution moves beyond merely problematizing the dynamics in children's literature; she also offers a seven-point plan to “reimagine the past.” The plan presents distinct actions that can and should be taken to “decenter whiteness,” with a goal of creating a standard of critical-cultural literacy in children's librarianship.

There is still more potential CRT depth that can be drawn from Lugo Vázquez's contribution. What if we suggest Derrick Bell's CRT tool of interest convergence as a possible addendum to this counternarrative? Interest convergence, as defined by Bell, is the idea that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (1980, 523). When applied more broadly in the context of Lugo Vázquez's contribution, we can expand on Bell's notion to understand that the interest of subordinated groups is accommodated only when it serves some clear benefit for dominant groups. As a contribution to the CRT in LIS tool kit, interest convergence is a complementary tool that assists in locating existing points of interest, identifying interested parties, further contextualizing possible counterstories, and revealing situations where multiple identities exist but are underdiscussed.

In fact, in Lugo Vázquez's seven-point plan to reimagine the past we can see the development of interest convergence as endeavors of equity building versus conflicts for dominance. For example, the author's first point, “Acknowledge the humanity of ALL children,” can and should be a point of interest convergence that transcends race or any other context of identity politics. An application of Bell's interest convergence

as an analytical tool to Lugo Vázquez's text, along with future CRT in LIS research, can certainly add to efforts of equity and social justice in the field.

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

—Frederick Douglass

Harrison W. Inefuku adeptly does what all CRT work should do—that is, describe in detail the nuances and micro-nuances of racism and or other forms of bias and discrimination. In “Relegated to the Margins: Faculty of Color, the Scholarly Record, and the Necessity of Antiracist Library Disruptions,” Inefuku shines a light on many of the hiding places of institutional racism as it plays out in the hiring, retention, and promotion of faculty of color.

Inefuku's work presents an opportunity to introduce another CRT tool to the LIS discourse—namely, Smith's concept of racial battle fatigue (Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007).<sup>6</sup> Racial battle fatigue is a theoretical framework for examining social-psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies) associated with the experiences of People of Color, including both students and faculty at historically white campuses (552). Examining together the works of Inefuku and Smith and colleagues enables us to bring in a model from equity and inclusion work, the intention and impact paradigm. While in most cases the intention of nuanced, semisubtle expressions of White Supremacy and white privilege *may* not be to inflict trauma, the impact of institutional racism on college campuses and in LIS certainly and perhaps consistently results in the trauma of racial battle fatigue.

It is never too late to give up your prejudices.

—Henry David Thoreau

Given the contributions in this section as well as the overall collected work in this book, I am proud to state that Critical Race Theory work in library and information science and archival studies is courageous, committed, intelligent, articulate, relevant, and evolving.

Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

—Barack Obama

## NOTES

1. The quintessence I am expressing, that metaphorically joy and pain are indeed like sunshine and rain, can best be experienced by listening to the version of “Joy and Pain” on *Maze Live in New Orleans* (Capitol Records, 1981).
2. Posttraumatic growth is broadly defined as positive psychological change resulting from a struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004, 1).
3. Apartheid ended in South Africa on April 27, 1994.
4. As a teachable moment, we should understand microaggressions to include the MACRO aspects of microaggressions or macroaggressions. The MACRO or macroaggression framework is threefold, based on time, scale, or time and scale. First, the accumulative effect as well as the legacy of a microaggression played out over generations has MACRO power or effect, thus creating a macroaggression over time. The second MACRO aspect is the microaggression based on scale. A large-scale or overt aggression that permeates and saturates at the societal level (i.e., on the national or global stage) would be considered a macroaggression.
5. “There are now reports in the literature of a very wide array of major life challenges that have acted as catalysts for posttraumatic growth. Many of the earlier research reports mentioned these growth outcomes in passing, but more recent investigations have been more specifically focused on these outcomes. Among the life crises that have produced reports of posttraumatic growth, at least in some form, are college students experiencing negative events” (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004, 3)
6. One of the first to bring the notion of racial battle fatigue to LIS was Renate Chancellor, in “Racial Battle Fatigue: The Unspoken Burden of Black Women Faculty in LIS” (2019).

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# Knowledge Justice

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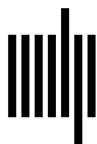
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